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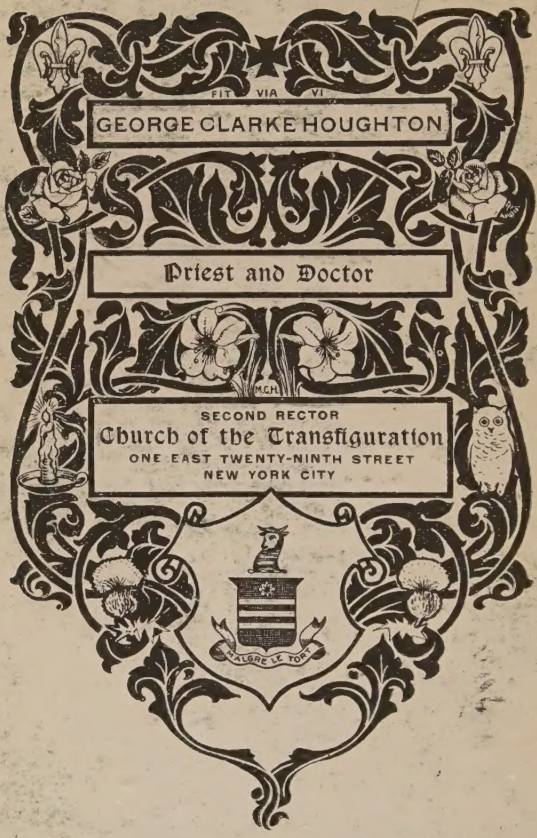
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SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTIONS.

The Religious Life.

BY THE

REV. T. T. CARTER,

RECTOR OF CLEWER,

AND HON. CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD.

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TO

HARRIET MONSELL,

TO WHOM,

AND TO WHOSE TWENTY-THREE YEARS OF SERVICE

AS THE FIRST MOTHER SUPERIOR OF THE

Community of S. John Baptist,

SHOWING HOW, IN A SELFISH AND WORLDLY AGE, SIMPLICITY OF DEVOTION MAY BE COMBINED WITH LARGEST SYMPATHIES, AND NOBLEST POWERS OF WORK FOR GOD,

THE COMMUNITY, AND HIMSELF PERSONALLY,

OWE MORE THAN HE CAN EXPRESS,

THIS VOLUME

IS WITH TRUEST AFFECTION AND RESPECT

DEDICATED

BY THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

THIS volume, like the former volumes of "Spiritual Instructions," is composed of addresses, given to the Sisters at the House of Mercy, Clewer, which from notes taken down at the time of delivery have been reproduced in their present shape. The "Instructions," forming the present volume, different in this respect from those which precede it, preserve their original form of address.

It should be further stated, that the subject matter of these addresses is not attempted to be treated of scientifically, under a strict theological aspect, but rather devotionally and practically; and that, being intended primarily for Sisters, the thoughts suggested have more special application to female Religious.

Lest misconception should arise in the mind of any reader of these pages, unacquainted with the established phraseology descriptive of conventual life, it may be well to add, that the terms, "Religious Life," and, "Religious," are used technically, that is to say, they do not imply any necessary superiority of religiousness in its ordinary sense, or any exclusive appropriation of religious principle, but they imply a life of rule and devotion, unlike that of ordinary social life, founded wholly on religion and directed wholly to religious

ends. The terms are not intended to arrogate anything as to comparative holiness, but only to affirm the exclusive character of the means and ends which form, in the case of the members of such Communities, the groundwork of a state separated from ordinary life for devotional and spiritual purposes. The terms are so completely established in Church use, that it were scarcely possible to substitute any equivalent for them, yet while they are, as at present, matters of question among us, an explanation seems to be needed, lest any discredit should be supposed to be cast on the holiness and devotion, which, as with a rival sanctity, may characterize true Christian life learnt and practised in the midst of the world.

Clewer Rectory,
The Epiphany, 1879.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

I. The Principles of the Religious Life generally stated 1

II. The Sealing 12

III. The Inner Spirit 24

IV. The Growth 36

V. The Energy 46

VI. The Law of Obedience 57

VII. The Law of Poverty 65

VIII. The Law of Chastity 75

IX. The Virgin State. I. 85

X. „ „ II. 93

XI. „ „ III. 104

XII. Sin in Relation to the Religious. I. . . . 113

XIII. „ „ „ II. . . . 125

XIV. „ „ „ III. . . . 135

XV. The Angelic Communion 147

XVI. The Prophet's Call 158

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE.

I.

ITS PRINCIPLES GENERALLY STATED.

Dear Sisters, we have been dwelling on the Incarnation of God, and some of the chief consequences of this great Mystery. I would now lead you to think of its bearing on the Religious Life; and this will prepare the way for the general consideration of the Principles of this Life, to which you have been called, which I purpose to continue in the subsequent addresses.

Think, then, how the Incarnation of God gave a new impulse to human nature, stirring the souls of men, as you have yourselves been stirred. The blessed consciousness of God having become "manifest in the Flesh;" the spiritual beauty of the character of Jesus Christ; the attractiveness of the spirit of self-sacrifice which appeared in all the actions and even the commonest incidents of His Life—these objects spell-bound the imagination of those to whom He revealed Himself. It was the entering in of a higher world into our earthly state, the intrusion among men of a new and an all-absorbing ideal. The influence was felt in the

most retired homes, influencing one after another, as the call of God awakened them, infusing new powers and drawing away those who received the call from former ties and associations, to give themselves wholly to their Lord, to follow Him, as His Spirit guided them.

Our Lord spoke of the revolution of thought and feeling which His Life in the Flesh would produce in numberless cases, and specially in reference to Family life. He foreshowed the partings asunder of those most closely knit together; the pain involved in the separation; the trials resulting from it; and this all the more because often misunderstood, often judged suspiciously, and at times violently opposed. He spoke of the heart-struggles that would ensue as His words met with the heart's full response. He spoke to parent and to child alike of the loss incurred in not regarding Him and His service as the chief object. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me."[1] He spoke at the same time of the endless recompense, the rewards of faithfulness which even at this present time would be more than a compensation for the sacrifices which would be made, that "Every one that hath forsaken" what is most dear, for His "Name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."[2]

The Holy Scriptures record how this life of entire devotion, first exhibited in its fulness in the Person of our Lord, was afterwards reproduced in the lives of His Apostles. On this account the keenest interest attaches to the writings of the Apostles, for there we trace the working of the Life of Jesus in persons like

[1] S. Matt. x. 37. [2] S. Matt. xix. 29.

to ourselves, of similar infirmities and like dispositions. In Him we see all possible perfections; in His Saints who followed Him we see the same characteristics, but imperfect, and accompanied with faults which connect them with ourselves. Their success therefore tends to inspire us with the hope of a like union with Him, even though in manifold ways unworthy of it.

There are two reasons why such special vocations were intended to be continued in the kingdom of CHRIST:

I. First, it was necessary for the fulfilment of our LORD'S purpose in redeeming the lost world, and gathering in His elect. Only by such entire, concentrated devotion could the full purpose of His grace reach the countless souls "scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd."[1] While the greater number of His chosen ones remain in their appointed homes, in the ordinary course of the world, following His example in domestic life, others must needs be free from earthly ties, to wander to and fro, obedient to His instant call, and thus carry out the missionary character of His ministry, as His free Spirit traverses the earth, unfettered, as their LORD Himself, by earthly entanglements or external claims.

What would have been the fate of the Gospel; how could the power of redeeming love have been extended throughout the world, and brought to bear on the darker places of the earth, if there had been no Apostolic life; had none been found to share with the Apostles their entire, undivided surrender of themselves? If only a more perfect form of domestic and social life had been developed out of the example of JESUS, the full claims of His "FATHER'S business"[2]

[1] S. Matt. ix. 36. [2] S. Luke ii. 49.

could not have been accomplished; His love would have been "straitened"[1] through lack of earthly instruments to extend and perpetuate it.

II. It was necessary also for the complete manifestation of the life of the Incarnation, that there should be a continual reproduction of the different states in which our LORD revealed Himself. The Church of the Elect was intended to image and represent CHRIST on earth, to be His perpetual witness in the midst of the world. As the Home Life in which His earlier years were passed with His Blessed Mother, was to live on as the pattern for Christian households; as social life received an impulse of a higher purity, and a more enlarged charity, from His participation in its festivities; as His sufferings were evermore to sanctify and exalt all forms of trial to which flesh is heir; as His Priesthood was to be perpetuated by an order bearing the seal of a like commission endued with the same powers of grace; so there was equally to be a ceaseless exhibition of His devoted life, to be fulfilled under the impulses of purely spiritual aspirations, to be in spirit at least, even as He was during His ministry, a wayfarer and a pilgrim, fed by the chance alms of the stranger, not having "where to lay His Head,"[2] absorbed in the purposes of an entire self-sacrifice, consecrating all the powers of Humanity to the glory of His FATHER, as He "went about doing good."[3]

There are different forms which such self-devotion may assume, which aspire to fill up the measure of the devoted life of CHRIST, and thus perpetuate on earth His boundless charity.

[1] S. Luke xii. 50. [2] S. Luke ix. 58. [3] Acts x. 38.

Such, for instance, is the Missionary life; the surrender of home and country; the venturing forth among new and strange scenes and people, amidst various dangers and constant risks, with often unrequited toil and long deferred hope, for the rescue of lost nations from the dominion of Satan.

Such, also, is the Religious Life. The term now implies a Community living together under common rule for common ends, in absorbing love and imitation of CHRIST, separate from the world and all its ties, whether of society or of home, and distinguished by certain principles, of which the three following are the chief:

(1.) First, it implies a virgin, or, as included under the same idea, a widowed chastity. Our LORD, Himself a Virgin, of a Virgin born, infused into our nature, and sanctified in His own Person, this great grace. It thus became a special vocation to be cherished for His dear sake, in loving union with Himself. He raised it to a peculiar dignity to be a type on earth of the Heavenly life in the realisation of a perfect union of redeemed humanity in GOD, as when He said, "In the Resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of GOD in Heaven."[1] As our LORD's Advent in the Flesh united the Heavenly with the earthly, and by such association raised the earthly into capacities above itself, so this entire consecration of soul and body to GOD was to become henceforth a special gift of grace in His kingdom on earth, in whomsoever He might call to it, and who when thus called could embrace it.

(2.) An entire detachment from the things of this world is a second condition of the same devoted state,

[1] S. Matt. xxii. 30.

or what is known as the law of Poverty. By this term it is not meant that all earthly possessions necessarily are renounced, or the use of external goods wholly put aside. Poverty must always of necessity be a question of degree. The term when employed in connection with the Religious Life, means the possessing nothing of one's own; the using only what a settled rule permits; the having no freedom of choice, no allowed desire beyond what the established order provides. In this sense our LORD was poor. He did not refuse to share what the laws of nature required, or what even of costly gifts love or fervent piety offered to Him. But He had nothing of His own; His daily needs were supplied out of the common stock which the chance free offerings of a natural piety supplied. His only real possession was the necessary clothing which He wore.

(3.) There is yet a third principle, which is also of the essence of the Religious state, grounded equally on the laws which characterised our LORD's earthly life—obedience. In one sense, all who are CHRIST's must live in obedience, as being subject to His commandments. But, as applied to the Religious Life, the term has a specific meaning. In ordinary life, even in its most devout state, there is a freedom of the will, a liberty to select at pleasure what is agreeable to the taste, or passing impulse, the exercise of one's own judgment alone determining the choice. But the specific obedience intended, implies an obligation to surrender this liberty of choice. The conscience of its own voluntary action has bound itself by rules which control all energies, regulate all desires, and limit the exercise of the will. In this same manner our LORD

was guided through all His ministry by a constant reference to His FATHER's will, even in matters comparatively indifferent, allowing Himself no independent choice. "As I hear, I judge."[1] "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work."[2] This principle of submission in details fixed the order, the time, and the scene of His labours, and determined all the circumstances of His sufferings. They were what prophecy had foretold.

It is not meant that in the Religious Life the will has forfeited its inherent gift of freedom, or the conscience its inalienable sense of responsibility. It is only that the soul, seeking to be more entirely disciplined, and by greater self-surrender more entirely conformed to a standard of holiness, accepts what the Rule supplies, and being thus more inwardly subdued, is enabled to live in closer union with, and resemblance to, its LORD.

Such, generally speaking, are the principal forms of the Life to which, dear Sisters, you have given yourselves. Let me further lead you to consider some of the special graces which should adorn such a state, and which are therefore tests of a right spirit in the Religious.

(1.) One such characteristic of great practical moment is simplicity, a grace which shows itself in the ready acknowledgment of sin, or error, whether the knowledge of it arise secretly within oneself, through the light of the HOLY SPIRIT, or through reproof or correction from without. Child-likeness, in desiring to have faults pointed out, and allowing oneself to be in the wrong, not shrinking from having faults made known to others, even to those whom one would most

[1] S. John v. 30. [2] S. John iv. 34.

desire to please, or to whom one is least drawn;—in fact, the welcoming any humiliation rather than appear better than one really is;—such is a true token of this essential grace. Cherish it, I beseech you, at all times, with a generous unselfishness and freedom from anxiety, through an absorbing desire to grow ever more and more perfect. Welcome any indication of a fault as a precious gift of GOD. Accept reproof, however painful, even with gladness, in the thankful consciousness of the power thus obtained of being more true to your Vocation, more pleasing in the eyes of your LORD.

(2.) Another virtue proper to such a state of Life is detachment from the prejudices and imaginings which may previously have possessed your mind as to what the Religious Life was to be, not lingering over recollections or fancies, so as to be hindered in the free course of faithful obedience to whatever may meet you in the fulfilment of your rule.

The history of the Apostles shows how they failed to understand the meaning of their call, and were thus often rendered incapable of corresponding with some gracious purpose of their LORD, because they brought with them into His service their own views and preconceived opinions. Thus, for instance, their earthly vision of His kingdom, and their incapacity for seeing how suffering was to be reconciled with His promise of power and glory, greatly marred, even where they did not wholly hinder, the reception of His grace. Similarly there is a tendency on entering the Religious Life to form untrue pictures of the future, imaginings woven out of one's own dreams, whether as to the blessings or the trials of a Religious; and often such views, even when renounced by the reason, cling fondly to the

memory, hindering freedom of spirit, lessening the power, whether of accepting the calls of God as they come in actual reality, or of entering into the meaning and value of different modes of discipline, which yet may be the most needful for overcoming the natural self; and thus preventing the full illumination of God's Holy Spirit, and the growth of an entire singleness of devotion.

The spirit needs to be prepared to find God in ways it knew not of, indifferent to the outward form of His manifestation, assured that He is to be met and understood only by going forth as Abraham, not "knowing whither he went." On such freedom of spirit your success and your happiness in the Religious Life must, dear Sisters, greatly depend. In order, therefore, to attain your end, thoughts of steadfastness and of trust should be cherished at all times, to be renewed under very varied circumstances. The continual thought should be under changing outward forms: "I believe in God Who has called Me; I am borne along by the power and breathings of His Spirit; I accept all that comes to me in the path of obedience; I know that all must work together for good to those that love to be ever nearer to Christ." In order to this, it is most necessary to keep your mind possessed with the belief that God will so order all that happens to you, that, if accepted meekly, it shall conduce more and more to perfect you in your Vocation, and strengthen the bond of union that binds you to your Lord.

(3.) A third grace of the inner life is, to cherish a willingness to bear loneliness or secret pain. There is no call of God that does not, in its possible consequences, involve some form of suffering. He sits "as a Refiner

and Purifier of silver."[1] He is perpetually employed in guiding all events, so as to separate the dross from the pure metal; the false principles and defects from the substance of the Spiritual Life; for "the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it be,"[2] and the Religious Life is specially the discipline that is meant to chasten and correct every evil that lurks within, while the higher aims are strengthened and matured through a searching discipline.

Whenever, therefore, any spiritual trial comes, shrink not from it; think not of the pain or humiliation as a mark of displeasure, or a sign that you are unworthy of the love of your LORD; neither regard sadness of spirit as a token that He has deserted you. Rather view such trial as a necessary consequence of an imperfect state, struggling under the pressure of great responsibilities with feeble energies, while yet the pressure is but an assurance of His will to leave within you neither "spot nor wrinkle,"[3] nor any lingering defect in the child of His election.

(4.) Yet one further grace may here be mentioned as essential above all others to render your devotion acceptable and your vocation true. It is personal, all-engrossing love to your dearest LORD. Believe that all that happens to you is from love. You would know this if you could see His mind visibly at work everywhere around you. As your own love increases, the truth of His love will reveal itself to you more and more as by a responsive consciousness. Spiritual, Divine love should rise above all the impulses of natural love, or else the powerful attraction to earthly associations will continue to be felt as a ceaseless hindrance.

[1] Malachi iii. 3. [2] 1 Cor. iii. 13. [3] Eph. v. 27.

As you learn to love your LORD above all others, and become more and more filled with spiritual desires, your spirit will become tenderer, your devotions more ardent, your work more full of zeal, your intercourse with your Sisters, and with all others, more gentle and forbearing. Trials seem light in the radiant warmth of love. Sufferings are suffused with a glory in the vision of love. In every difficulty that may arise you will best know how to discern His purpose by the magic clue of love. The interpretation of the problems of your mysterious life will best be read in the dispensation of His love, for "GOD is Love;" and "he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in GOD, and GOD in him."[1] Love has drawn you to CHRIST, love alone can bind you to Him, and love will perfect the work which He hath begun. To those who love Him GOD will in loving response open all His treasures; and as you are able to bear it, He will manifest His Mind more and more to your enkindled, enraptured sight.

May our good LORD grant to you all you can desire as He draws you ever nearer to Himself, and to each other in Himself, that as your days increase you may increase also in holy joy and heavenly consolations. May you be ever drawn by the working of the One Spirit within you; the same Spirit working, amid all varieties of His grace, to manifest our LORD as the source, the end of all, the All in all, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life."[2]

[1] 1 S. John iv. 16.

[2] S. John xiv. 6.

II.

THE SEALING.

Since I last addressed you, dear Sisters, two events have occurred of great moment to you; your Retreat, and a Profession. Both events are calculated to draw your souls more intimately into communion with the Invisible World, and to leave on your minds deep impressions.

If we compare the two, great as the influence of a Retreat may be, yet of greater moment is a Profession, for it is the Sealing of a soul in a Religious Vocation. However blessed it is to be rapt in silence, in an absorbed consciousness of the mysteries of God, and as the Heavenly Visions pass before your minds, to gaze, to feed upon them in undisturbed repose,—yet the actual fulfilment of the purpose of God, in one whom He has called, and who has been prepared for it; the setting on her the visible sign of acceptance, binding her to her Lord, is an event fraught with deeper and more lasting consequences.

The Profession into the Religious Life is a great crisis in the soul's life. All that the soul has done of itself, within itself in secret, its first offering, its subsequent acts of self-dedication, the solemn Retreat before entering the Novitiate, the whole week's Retreat before the Profession, with all the accompanying instructions,

and the practical discipline, day by day continued—all are instinct with grace and blessing. But the after Sealing, as by the Hand of GOD, through His Minister in His sanctuary, as the special expression of the Divine Call, is the visible sign of the fulfilment of the promise of His love.

You will remember in the Book of the Revelations, in the Sealing of the Elect, what great care is taken to secure the result, how a Voice was heard in Heaven, commanding the Angels "not to hurt the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees,"[1] until the act of grace was completed in each individual; lest there should be risk of possible failure of the intention of GOD for His chosen ones. There was a profound stillness while the Angel stamped the sacred Sign on the foreheads of the Elect, the invisible, mysterious Hand of the Messenger of GOD impressing the FATHER'S Name on His accepted children,—to be the visible witness here on earth, the outer Court of the Kingdom of Heaven, of their eternal bliss.

Like to this is the Profession of those whom GOD draws to Himself by special Vocations of grace. He to Whom you have given yourselves, dear Sisters, to Whom you are bound by the precious bond of a mystical Bridal; for Whom you have given up all else; He Whom you love above all others; Whom you desire evermore to glorify; with Whom you would dwell for ever; with Whom, as He wills, you would toil or suffer the appointed time on earth; Whom you are ever striving to imitate,—He sets His Seal upon you, as the security for your present and the pledge of your future blessedness. The Name of your LORD is secretly set

[1] Rev. vii. 3.

upon your heart, your brow, your hands, your feet, visible to the eyes of faith, and to the gaze of Angels, a manifestation of His will to all the world. The Seal is set upon your foreheads, that you may not be ashamed of your calling, or of the demands, or humiliations it may involve; upon your hands and feet, that all your activities, all your practical designs, your whole future course, may bear the visible impress of the mind of CHRIST; upon your heart, His secret abode, that your inner life may be perfectly fashioned after His Image; that you may become one in spirit and in love with your LORD, as the graces which His Spirit forms in you reveal themselves more and more in the character of your life.

Of this Sealing by the invisible Hand of GOD, the vows of the surrendered soul are the response, the witness of its own living acceptance of the covenant. As in an earthly marriage bond, when in assured confidence of tried affections, each promises, and accepts the troth of the other, while heart answers to heart, and hand is clasped in hand, so in grace a spiritual bond consecrates the new relationship, overruling all other earthly claims. The bonds of spiritual love are drawn between you and your chosen LORD.

In order to perceive the full mystery of an accepted Vocation, it is necessary to consider it under two points of view,—(1) as to the relation of the individual soul to GOD, (2) as to its relation to the Community.

1. First, in regard to GOD. The archetype of a Vocation is to be found in the Mind of GOD, before the world was. We know not indeed fully what we mean when we speak of a primordial idea in the Mind of GOD, because we cannot properly attach the idea of a begin-

ning to any existence in GOD. But in some inconceivable mystery in the still depths of the Divine Nature existed the idea of the Incarnation of GOD, as a thought, a mental vision, having the form which He willed it to assume, before the fulness of time when JESUS CHRIST became a visible Reality external to Himself. In like manner, embodied in the idea of the Incarnation, lived the germs of all human Vocations, as parts of the same mystery. According to these patterns in the secret Life of GOD, such ideas have taken visible form and shape, coming forth into being in the individual souls created in CHRIST, as the SPIRIT communicates to each its predestined will, copies of the Life of JESUS, each responding to the call and work of grace; "the called according to His purpose," in the flowing on of the successive ages.

Each Vocation is thus at first only a thought, an idea formed within the Being of GOD. It becomes a visible act in His own appointed time, even as in the Fulness of time our LORD became Incarnate. Such ideals of the devoted life received their first sealing in our LORD Himself, through the operations in Him of the Eternal Spirit, for all first lived in Him. In His own Person, in His Baptism, was sealed the Life of Illumination; in His Temptation, the Life of power over evil; in His active Ministry, the Life of all spiritual zeal; in His Passion, the strength of patient endurance; in His Resurrection, the glory of the Spiritual Body; in His Ascension and Session at the Right Hand of the FATHER, the full Beatitude of our redeemed nature in union with GOD. As His Spirit goes forth from His Person among His Elect, the grace sealed upon Himself is communicated. The special forms of the Divine

Vocations arise in the predestinated, in each separately, as the Spirit "divideth to every one severally as He will."[1] Thus each one divinely chosen has a part with our Lord in the fulfilment of the purposes formed in the Mind of God from everlasting, and each soul who is faithful to any true Vocation will rejoice with Him in endless blessedness in His day of perfect joy.

From hence, then, dear Sisters, has arisen what you have experienced in yourselves,—the consciousness of the call of God gradually growing in strength, the drawings, the visions, the longings, the resolutions, the expanding views, the developing forces, the settled purposes, the advancing hope of the perfect enjoyment of an absorbed possession of the love of your Lord, and afterwards, as these preparations of heart have been trained and disciplined, the sense of the accepted state, the felt impression of the Divine witness in the power of the Holy Ghost, God openly acknowledging, through the ministry of His servant, His own secret work of grace.

O most mysterious course of the operations of the love of God! As we contemplate the whole progress of a supernatural life from its first beginning to its fulfilment, in this the earthly kingdom of His dear Son, and then follow its yet onward development, perfecting what is sealed, until the time when Jesus will Himself receive His chosen one to Himself, and present her as His own to His Father,—what grounds arise for thankfulness and praise, what cause for trust and growing confidence!

Holy Scripture moreover suggests the spirit in which such a call should be received and followed, in a passage in the sixth chapter of Isaiah, which you will at once

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 11.

recall to memory.[1] The Prophet is recording what he was permitted to see in vision within the Heavens. "I saw," he says, "the LORD sitting upon a throne high and lifted up." Angels surrounded the Throne in varied ministerings, some adoring, some actively employed, some waiting,—thus representing the union of the active and contemplative ministry as it is combined in the life of Glory. As the Prophet apprehended the meaning of the vision, and felt that he was being called to the same life of mingled prayer and labour, he became absorbed in the sense of the blessedness of a life to be thus spent in the service of GOD. But with this sense there arose a fear at the thought of what it involved, and in the consciousness of his own unworthiness he cries, "Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips." A shrinking, a trembling apprehension came over him, in which he could have drawn back from what nevertheless he so ardently desired. 'This is not for such as I am; I can never attain to what this calling demands.' But at that moment came a special individual manifestation of the will of GOD. "Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the Altar, and he laid it upon my mouth and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged." The reluctance, the fear, passed away at the sight of the Angel, and the power of his message. For a while the Prophet was entranced, and as he thus lay prostrate, he heard the mysterious communings of Heaven, even the secret intercourse between the adorable Persons of the Godhead, "Whom shall I send, and who will go

[1] Isa. vi. 1—8.

for Us?" Then sprang up in the Prophet's soul the steadfast resolve; all thoughts of himself merged in the conviction that as he was surely called, so his offer of himself would as surely be accepted, and the power of its fulfilment given to him. The eager answer arose to his lips, "Here am I, send me."

From this vision, dear Sisters, you may learn some important lessons. It is scarcely possible but that there should be shrinkings and misgivings at such a calling as you have received, fears of failing nature, quiverings of the feeble flesh under the pressure of the Will of GOD, apprehensions of the consequences, as the Spirit opens before the soul the sanctity of the laws of life by which its course henceforth must be determined, and the nature of the services which His law requires, that CHRIST may be glorified. But can we suppose that He Who calls will fail to impart to the soul the power that removes the fear, which can raise the soul above all natural apprehension, and kindle in it the fervour and strength of purpose equal to His demands? Is it not so that in the rapt silence brooding over a soul that feels itself called of GOD, voices are heard speaking of the future, of what He has purposed for His own glory, and the perfection of His chosen one? During the time of waiting which a Novitiate is intended to serve, is there not felt the growing access of increasing strength, the gathering impulse of the resolved will, enabling a faithful soul with freedom and fervent desire to correspond with the indications of the Mind of GOD? And as such a one hears His Voice, is she not stirred to arise and say with earnest humble confidence, "Here am I, send me?"

2. I have observed that in the Incarnation of our LORD,

the form and archetypes of a Religious Vocation, to be afterwards realised in individual souls, may be discerned. Let me also show how we may trace in the Threefold Personality of the Godhead the pattern of Community Life. The Godhead dwells in the Plurality of Persons bound together in a common Nature by a perfect oneness of will and of love. Each Blessed Person is the reflection of the Other, in the infinite attributes of their Being, in common purposes and desires, in mutual love and joy. God knows not solitude. A lonely state, however complete in itself, is not the law of the Divine Perfections. The Catholic doctrine rejects the idea of isolation, of Love living to itself alone, having its own separate ends, having no object common to others, desiring no companionship. The intercommunion of different Persons in different relations, living in unison, with true sympathies ceaselessly acting and reacting, is set before the creature as the perfect Exemplar of Life eternal, the Fulness of all possible Holiness, Peace, and Joy.

Thus in the Highest Revelation of Life, before the world was, we see typified the very principles which bind the Religious in a unity of purpose and the fellowship of a common Rule. Social forms of life, especially Family life with its relations of conjugal and filial dependence in the oneness of the flesh, and its sacred laws of common action and mutual sympathy, are true manifestations on earth of these transcendent principles, fulfilled from the very beginning, when God first said, "It is not good for man to be alone." And after the same pattern, though by a different rule, through the Spirit, a Religious Community in the voluntary dedication of its members bears this high and sacred impress

in its common life of many like-minded, bound together by spiritual bonds, by the common love of their LORD and of one another in Him.

Such Communities, having only spiritual objects as the groundwork of their common life, represent the ineffable and eternal Communion of the several Persons of the Godhead, Who, notwithstanding their different relations, ever dwell in a Perfect Unity. And as in GOD, so in such a Community, the powers of the common life diffuse themselves through the body from member to member, by mutual intercommunications, because of the oneness of their life, formed after a common rule, cherished by the common Offices of daily prayer and daily Communion, actively maintained by the ceaseless acts of fellowship, of common work, of prayer, of aim after like graces, of similar consolations under like trials. Quick pulsations pass throughout the members of such a body, through the common bonds and links that bind them each to each, and all together in their LORD, as the movements of a common Nature pervade the several Persons of the Godhead. As we receive the graces of the Sacraments within the greater circle of the Catholic Church, not merely or only by separate acts of GOD towards individual souls, but as members united in the one Body of CHRIST, and as parts of His Body, and common partakers of the same graces,—so within the lesser circles of Religious Communities, life kindles life, light reflects light, and grace, as in an electric circle, permeates and binds in one all kindred souls, wherever such life is truly lived. A peculiar blessedness and satiety of peace ought to be felt as an invisible chain sanctifying such common fellowship. It is not merely for the beauty of such combinations, or their in-

creased capacity of doing good, because more can be done by an united body than by individuals, that the attraction towards Religious Communities is experienced, but because a closer link with God in His dear Son and in His Spirit, is become the desire and joy of the soul's quickened life, and because within the sphere of such Communities powers of the Divine Life are multiplied, and are communicated, each blest in another's blessing, each made rich in another's treasure, and all together growing through the increase to which each contributes a portion, in the throbbings of the common pulsations of the same heart-life, having its source, its centre, and its end in God.

Let us gather up shortly what has been here said.

(1.) We have seen the true ground and reality of your Vocations, dear Sisters, in their first conception in the Mind of God, their primeval forms being the eternal ideas of the Godhead, first realised as created existences in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then through the operations of His Spirit formed in yourselves. Pure Vocations possess a stability which is beyond time and space, beyond the instability of this lower world. They are in you the power of the Holy Ghost, in the communication and imitation of the grace flowing from your Lord, according to a Divine predestination, instinct with supernatural power, containing in themselves unknown possibilities, and spiritual attainments which are intended to glorify God, if you are true in your desire to aid in the accomplishment of the mission of His dear Son, to share His joy in the day of the manifestation of His Elect.

(2.) What passes upon and within the soul in the

fulfilment of a true profession is a real sealing of God, which, having been tested as far as possible by outward signs of acceptance and approval, is surely in those who are faithful to its demands an everlasting bond of union with your Lord, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail,—a seal of Divine acceptance which involves all needful support and guidance, and which to the Professed, if true to their Profession, becomes a medium through which the Divine Life ceaselessly imparts itself, growing ever onward into its appointed fulness. Each one thus dedicated is meant to be the manifestation of a Divine purpose, so that in the consummation of all things God may see His own work in each one whom He has called, as time yields up to eternity the fruits which His grace has matured.

O wonderful anticipation of the coming glory, if it be granted to you to abide faithful, to be kept steadfastly advancing in your Profession, manifesting more and more the Divine Love, that its accomplishment in you may be owned by Him from Whom it emanated. As the ritual of the Tabernacle of Israel was to be the faithful representation of the pattern shown on the Mount to the inspired gaze of the great Lawgiver, so surely should we be able to trace in souls sealed to a Religious Profession the features of an Eternal Vocation as it dwelt in the Mind of God.

May you, dear Sisters, go forward in your course, in hope that when you are called within the veil, to render up your account to God, He may recognise in you the fulfilment of His purpose, and in your service a faithful imitation of His dear Son; that He may own you before the Father as His chosen ones; that when the Voice of the Bridegroom is heard and the marriage supper

of the Lamb is made ready, and the inner chambers of the eternal Beatitude are opened, you may enter in, the embrace of the everlasting GOD enfolding you in the endless joy of His Saints.

Grant, LORD, that this may be the lot of those here gathered in, and of all who with them may be bound by the same cords of love, and in whomsoever the Divine calling may now or evermore be graciously fulfilled to the glory of Thy grace, to Whom with the FATHER and the Eternal Spirit be praise and thanksgiving for ever. Amen.

III.

THE INNER SPIRIT.

We have considered generally, dear Sisters, the chief elements constituting the Religious Life, the forms it assumes, and the closeness of the relation in which it stands to the Life of God. It is necessary to look yet deeper, and consider the spirit in which these movements of life originate, and by which they ought continually to be animated, in order that the purpose of God in such a Vocation may meet with a true response.

The observance of Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience to a Community Rule, is not of itself necessarily a fulfilment of the call of God. A true correspondence with such a call depends on the spirit animating the soul's devotion as it surrenders itself to live by such principles. As when Mary sat at the feet of Jesus, it was not her withdrawal from household occupations, nor her listening attitude, which constituted her acceptableness in the eyes of her Lord; it was her intense gaze of heart fixed upon Him, her deep thirst for Divine knowledge, the abandonment of her soul in entire self-dedication to His attractions, and the longing for an intimate union of her whole soul with Him. It was this that moved Him to bear the imperishable witness

to her high vocation, that she had "chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."[1]

Even so in the case of a Sister's life, it is not the mere conformity to the laws regulating and determining its outward character, and separating it from other forms of life, which constitutes the perfectness for which your LORD looks; it is the inner truth of the heart's devotion, seeking to be given up to Him at any cost, as the dearest and most desired portion. This constitutes the vital bond between the soul and Himself, of which the laws of the Religious Life are special means and tokens. True, that in the observance of these laws in themselves, there may be real earnest self-sacrifice, involving much secret trial; true, that the bonds of discipline bound about a Sister's soul of necessity bring all her outward actions under a fixed order, implying much self-denial, yet there may be nevertheless a want of inward correspondence with their spirit, an absence of living power and right dispositions in their observance.

Think what constitutes a Martyr in the sight of GOD. It is not the patient endurance of suffering, nor the overcoming the frailty and tenderness of nature, nor the surrender of what is naturally so precious as one's very life itself. What makes the Martyr is the faith and love of the soul cleaving to GOD, rising above all earthly attractions, above fear, above natural weakness, thus uniting the will with the Will of GOD, the affections with His personal love. Even so in the life of a Religious, beneath its outward forms, deeper than any vows or acts of consecration, beneath all sensible marks by which a Sister is sealed, there needs, in order

[1] S. Luke x. 42.

to be true to the Divine intention, hidden powers animating these forms and outward expressions, uniting the inner spirit with the mind of CHRIST. On this, above all else, the conditions of faithfulness depend.

If we seek for the true archetype of the spirit of a Religious life, we must lift up our eyes to Heaven. We have seen how the Divine Pattern of such a vocation, and of Community Life, is exhibited in the very Persons of the Blessed Trinity. We have dwelt upon these higher laws of life, existing first as ideas in the Mind of GOD, and afterwards embodied in a created form in the Person and Life of CHRIST, and then communicated to His elect, to become the visible representations of pre-existent Realities in GOD Himself. We must in like manner look for the animating spirit of such a life in the same Source of all Holiness.

Let us now consider the first movements of such a spirit. For this we must turn to GOD the FATHER Who is the Beginning of all life, in Whom is the origin of all Being. We may look to find in Him the prototype of the first springs of the life of a Religious.

What, as far as we are able to judge, moved GOD to create? What led Him to come forth to form and bless the creature? That He has revealed Himself under the name of Love,—"GOD is Love,"[1]—implying that Love is specially characteristic of Himself, would seem to imply that these secret movements of His Ineffable Being arose out of the hidden depths of Divine Love. Names in their original essence are realities, and express the vital qualities of what they represent. Moreover, we are expressly taught in reference to the

[1] 1 S. John iv. 8.

Missions of the Second and the Third Persons of the Blessed Trinity, that love was the one moving cause. Thus in regard to the Mission of the Eternal Son; "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."[1] And that love was the moving spring to which is due the Mission of God the Holy Ghost, we may infer from the assurance that "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."[2] The same appears to be implied in the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit when He came forth and abode on our Blessed Lord for the accomplishment of His Mission, bearing witness to the ineffable gift of love, "This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."[3] The Father beheld the fulfilment of His purpose in the perfected Humanity which He had called into being, and out of the same depths of Love the Spirit of God descending like a dove lighted upon Him, and thus was formed the means through which the Fount of Eternal Charity might diffuse Itself through the whole mystical Body of Christ, which was in course of time to develop itself in the new race arising out of the new Adam, as Himself had come forth from the sources of Divine Love in the central Heart of Life of the Ever Blessed Trinity.

Love, therefore, is the source or spring out of which the highest life is created. And this Love is a perpetually acting, moving power, as it is said of the love of the Son of God in the flesh, "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end."[4]

[1] S. John iii. 16.
[2] Rom. v. 5.
[3] S. Matt. iii. 17.
[4] S. John xiii. 1.

Love is the animating spirit which sustains the life of the Incarnation and the Mission of the Holy Spirit. As in Love they originated, so in Love they are ever freshly sustained, having no end, ever issuing out of the perennial depths of the Godhead, as ever returning into It, continually manifesting themselves in time, as in eternity they are ever ceaselessly renewed.

Here, then, dear Sisters, we may understand whence arise the first movements of the inner spirit of a true Religious Vocation, conformed to the Mind of God. It is Love; the love of Heavenly above earthly objects, of Heavenly above earthly knowledge, of Heavenly above earthly companionship, of Heavenly above earthly sympathies, of Heavenly above earthly beauty. It is Love springing in the depths of a soul that sees by an illuminating grace the higher worlds of being, and the possibility of attaining, embracing, and enjoying these Heavenly realities even under the conditions of our earthly state. It is Love that draws the soul to give itself to be fitted for a life conformed to these Divine objects, and made capable of fulfilling their requirements. The evidence of this Love is found in the delight which the Soul takes in these objects, as it grasps them, and as it is led on to aspire after, and to attain to, an increasing capacity for corresponding with them. This delight is shown in the love of the exercises which further the chosen end more than in all other occupations, in the satisfaction at the daily course deepening into an abiding rest, in the desire for devotion growing to be more and more absorbing—a desire, tested by varied forms of discipline, and unexpected occasions of trial, yet continuing to bind the Soul the more firmly to its first choice, by an unseen chain of closest attach-

ment, notwithstanding all sense of weakness, and natural reluctance, and passing impulses of the lower nature.

And as love is the source of the first movements of the Soul towards a Religious Vocation, so is it the perennial fount out of which arise ever fresh ardours, and renewed desires for greater attainments and more perfect expressions of itself. It is so in our nature because it is so in GOD. As from the Beginning He is Love, He changes not, He ever continues to be Love. As Love is in Him the source of creative energy, so is it the cause of the sustained life of the creation. His Love in its ceaseless flow knows no end, no diminution, no loss; perpetually issuing from the same fulness in which from Eternity it proceeded forth, it ever moves onward into the Eternity that is to come, unchanging, unchangeable. So the sustained perfection of a Sister's life must be derived from the source out of which its original powers were derived. As the love of Heavenly above earthly objects first quickened the desire, and confirmed the purpose, so the same grace must needs grow into a habit, an abiding power. Rather its force and fervour should increase, if not in conscious impulse, yet in real effective strength. At first perhaps it was a fearful, trembling, scrupulous love, hardly knowing what it desired, what its real aim; still less what it might venture, what it might ask for, what sacrifices it could endure.

But if the Vocation be true, the vision becomes clearer, the purpose more settled, the aim bolder. And as it feeds on the vision opening before its gaze, it grows and enlarges its desire. As rivers broaden as they flow, drawing into their channels in their onward course other

streams, which swell the mass of waters, so in a true Sister's life, as it is fed by Divine teaching, by example, by the exercises of prayer and meditation, by its varied consciousness of delight in its possession, love deepens and enlarges and draws within its range other powers of life which become animated by its influence, and pervaded by its spirit, so as to seem to be only fresh developments of love, as Holy Scripture teaches, that love is "the keeping of the commandments," that "love is the fulfilling of the law."[1]

Here, then, dear Sisters, is the spring of the inner spirit of a Religious Vocation; the same motive which is revealed to us as the cause of the Incarnation of our LORD, and of His Mission among the creatures; and the cause also of the going forth of the HOLY GHOST in His ceaseless work of sanctification. This same living power lies beneath all the movements which have led to your lifelong devotion to GOD; love ever stretching forth in desire after Him, ever forming renewed purposes of more earnest service. You are drawn to seek Him under the same influences which led Him to seek you, to save you and to bless you in His love. Ask yourselves, therefore, Is this great primal grace thus ever animating my life? Is it being sustained and deepened, that it may continue to be the well-spring of all holy actions and continued devotion?

And here it is necessary to distinguish between the joy and the power of a Sister's life.

The joy of a Sister's life is the vision of Him Whom she loves. But from the infirmities of our nature, and the variability of created things, this vision which is seen through nature is subject to change. As in the

[1] Rom. xiii. 10.

outward world a mist may dim, a cloud may wholly obscure, the light of the sun, so the eye of the soul may be darkened, the power of sight be less vivid at one time than another. It is the very purpose of the discipline of life to test the soul's steadfastness under variable conditions. God may even try most keenly those whom He loves best, and would raise to highest perfection. He will at times purposely hide Himself within the soul, even from the soul's consciousness; or He may deprive the vision of Himself of its wonted sweetness, taking away the power of enjoyment, while the consciousness remains clear. He may raise the soul to higher delights by an increased light, and a fuller sense of possession; or He may suffer despondency to settle down upon the soul with fears, whether it is indeed loved, or itself loves, as at the first.

These are the passing changes, in which the soul is intended to learn to be independent of mere sensations and outward appearances; to be satisfied by the assurance of the Presence of its Lord revealed only to Faith; to love Himself and not merely His consolations; to be true to Him Who has drawn it to Himself, however secretly, trusting His designs, though it understand them not.

But the loss of the joy and sweetness of love is quite distinct from the loss of Love itself; and only the loss of Love itself is the loss of the power of a Sister's life. Only when Love is chilled does the life flag and fail. Only then does all become stale, monotonous, unprofitable; only then every effort is difficult, and every obstacle seemingly insurmountable, and all that is above the common order of life unreal. But there may be as strong a purpose, as firm a resolution, as true a devo-

tion, when only the brightness of the vision is gone, and the sweetness is no longer felt. Love may be animating the will, and determining the choices of the soul as truly, as keenly as ever, and be as surely the sustaining power and animating principle when all joy is gone from its sensations, as when the consciousness was full of sweetness. Light and warmth still maintain the material world, though the Sun itself be clouded, or even completely hidden. Even so love may sustain the soul, though its consciousness is retired into hidden depths of the soul's life.

Temptations indeed will beset the soul when exposed to such a trial. There may arise, for instance, the thought that it is impossible to continue in such a state, even that there is no truth in one's Vocation; and then will follow fears and scruples, causing you to despond, perhaps even to despair. But this would be wholly to mistake the purpose of such a trial. It may seem to be a lack of love, when yet it is only a suspension in the sensations of love. Or what tries you may be some passing trouble of heart, some want of harmony with others, some secret fault which, through the grace of God, an act of contrition or confession would quickly put away. The trial has been permitted to come, that you may be led to a deeper humility, or an acknowledgment of some sin lurking within. Let this be wrought, and love will soon be felt again as fully and as brightly as before. As the oil may be in the lamp, though the flame has sunk down ready as it seems to expire, yet the cleansing of the wick causes an instant rekindling of its former brightness. And even so the clearing away of the transient hindrance will be the revival of love as of old.

Or such trial may be intended to teach a special lesson of Community life. It may be that the soul needs sympathy, the enlivening which the communion of heart with heart produces, and which the sense of kindred aims and like trials, is intended by GOD to supply. This may be GOD's own teaching, that love may be more cherished; that each may learn, through another's trial, how souls are destined to find a special support when all are bound together through fellowship of mutual interests, endeavouring to live in all simplicity with the opening out of heart to heart in the consciousness of having one aim, one object, and one law of life. GOD has willed that the joy and rest of one being should in many ways be dependent on another; and as the life of the whole body is dependent on its several members, so each member depends on the whole body. As all members of the Mystical Body of CHRIST in its wider circle act and re-act on each other, so in the contracted sphere of a Religious Community the like sense of common responsibilities and common duties becomes a mutual support, and this all the more strongly because the aims of all are the highest, and the bonds that bind them are closely knit together in GOD, the Living Source of all true power.

Or, again, such loss of the joy and sweetness of love may be intended as a discipline, through some secret design of GOD, to lead the soul in the way of pure faith and simple trust; that the soul may learn to live more entirely on Himself, though hidden, as flowers retain their beauty under clouded skies, and so the more prove its truth, and manifest its power without the adventitious aid of happier sensations. But to

follow out this view would lead us into deeper thoughts than could now be adequately treated.

But whatever the cause of such a trial, be not, dear Sisters, disheartened. In every condition of life, the soul ever needs re-quickening, ever needs guarding from tendencies to decline, and strengthening with fresh aids of grace. Be careful only that the current of your life flows on as it sprang forth in its first impulses. Cherish love above all things; love to your LORD, and to all in Him. Keep up a constant intercourse with your LORD as though He were always calling you. See that this inner communion breathes in your prayers. See that your purposes are true to His will; your spirit conformed to His patience, His gentleness, His kindness; your desires fed by His promises; your heart warmed by His example. So shall you be prepared to meet Him when He comes visibly forth out of the depths of that invisible world where He now reigns in glory, and where He waits for the accomplishment of your mission.

If in searching your heart you find that love has failed to preserve its fulness, consider the depths of the well of life out of which you may always draw those blessed waters of eternal life. Ask of GOD the HOLY GHOST, Who is Himself the Perfectness of Love, Himself very Love, to shed forth Himself in your soul out of His fulness more and more, and to kindle within you fresh fervours.

And do Thou, O LORD, grant that there may be a full response out of Thy treasures of grace to this petition of Thy children, as they seek through Thy grace to grow after the pattern of the Love, which in heaven lives not only in Thy own Being, but in the form of

Man, glorified, and ever glorifying Thee. Thou seekest through Thy CHRIST to find this love in Thy own elect, and deignest to accept what feeble offerings they can make. Do Thou respond to their desires, that still ever growing into Thy fulness, they may hereafter have their portion with Thee in the same Eternity, enshrined within the same Blessedness for evermore.

IV.

THE GROWTH.

We have been considering, dear Sisters, the first movements of a true Religious Vocation; let us now consider its onward growth. For this we need a standard by which to measure its progress, and a rule to direct the course that tends towards its attainment.

It is of the utmost importance to have such a standard, not only as a measure by which to test your life, but also in order to keep up a steadfast aim, and assure you, while it is being followed, of the truth of your Life. You may continually have to deplore inconsistencies and imperfections, which delay the hope of its attainment; but time is nothing with God. Let the tendency only be true, and the growth in what He looks to find in you, by which He judges you, steadfast.

We have seen that the first spring or movement of a Religious Vocation is love—the love of Heavenly above earthly or human objects of attraction; and that this specially connects the Religious Life with God the Father, as in Him are treasured up all the sources of life. But as the Son is the revealed God, the express image of the Father, the visible realization of the Mind of the Father, so we may look to find in Him, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the standard of all human perfection. For this reason a Religious

Vocation will be developed, its desires carried out, its actions directed to a perfect end, in the Imitation of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. This indeed follows from what has been already said in considering the first movements of a Religious Vocation; for, if the love of JESUS CHRIST kindles the first fervour of the soul, leading it to desire a Heavenly Object above an earthly, a Heavenly Bridal above an earthly bridal; if the longing to be wholly and individually His, as Beloved above all other, has determined the choice of the Religious Life, then His example must also determine the character and the progressive advance of such a life, in order that it may be a true following of Him Who can love only what is like to Himself, and find rest for His desires only in the soul forming after His Own Image.

Thus, then, the law of growth, the second point to be considered, connects the life of the Religious with the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, as the first movements of such a life connect it with GOD the FATHER.

The Vision of her unseen LORD, first growing into definite shape and feature, pictured on a Sister's soul, is at once the measure and the witness of her advance in the practical truth of her Vocation. A Divine Illumination, through the inspiration of the HOLY SPIRIT, fed and deepened through meditation, spreads before her inner gaze one feature after another of the Life of JESUS, His interior dispositions, His desires, His aims, His principles of action. As the soul becomes more and more impressed with this Vision, its desires are the more inflamed, its resolutions strengthen, its powers develope, the heart and spirit expand and rise. Gazing on this Object as the embodiment of all that is most lovely and attractive, most perfect in moral and spiritual

beauty, the true Sister's life becomes gradually assimilated to it. The shifting forms of earth, its vanities and deceits, its transient and uncertain pleasures, become less and less to be desired, and fade before the Eternal Realities, the higher, purer order of being, as the only satisfying, as it is the only enduring, portion.

As it was love for this Object, however dimly seen, however tremblingly embraced, which first led to the desire for its attainment, and then determined the soul to give up all else—all earthly ties, possessions, companionships—in order to attain to it more perfectly, while as yet scarce apprehending the force of the power thus acting upon the mind, so all through the life of the Religious her advance depends on the influence of this same Vision. Through its power she is transformed more and more into the Likeness of Him Whom she loves, the Bride more and more assimilated to her heavenly Spouse; common sympathies drawing heart to heart, common principles and the same objects animating her being in her measure, as they animate Him in His fulness.

One of the three conditions of the outward form of a Sister's life corresponds more especially with this principle of growth—the law of Obedience. Of the three main laws which characterise the Religious Life, this must take the precedence of the other two, as the most practically important in this respect. For while Poverty involves the surrender of all outward possessions, and Virginity surrenders the body, it is Obedience only which surrenders the will, and the surrender of the will is that which determines all the currents of the interior life, and therefore constitutes the most complete offering.

It is clear, in speaking of Obedience, that while submission to the Rule of a Community, and to Superiors whom the Rule invests with authority, is all that can be demanded, it yet may be only an external service. The truth of the Religious Life is fulfilled only as the soul offers a willing subjection to what it outwardly professes, as our LORD subordinated His thoughts and actions to the law of duty which He willed to accept.

As love drew the SON of GOD from heaven to fulfil the Divine purpose to save the lost, so a constant obedience to His FATHER'S will continually directed Him to this His chosen end. As it has been already observed, He revealed Himself to us in the flesh only after this law of entire identification of Himself with His FATHER. "That which the FATHER doeth, the same doeth the SON likewise."[1] "As I hear, I judge."[2] "I came not to do Mine own will, but the will of the FATHER Who sent Me."[3] Such words express a ceaseless watchfulness, a continual gaze on the Mind of the FATHER, the life of the SON exhibiting itself as the perfect expression of the Mind of the FATHER; His human visible Form the perfect representation of the invisible Form of the Divine Nature, so that, as He declared, "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the FATHER."

This law of interior Obedience is most clearly shown in the life of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. In Him Obedience was not merely conformity to a Rule, not merely the observance of a certain standard of life, even the highest—it was in His case a mind, a will, instinct with the idea of submission, showing how such constant interior submission to the highest Ideal is the true sign of the transformation of the creature; that the

[1] S. John v. 19. [2] S. John v. 30. [3] S. John vi. 38.

continual influence of a Divine example, faithfully and loyally copied by a loving heart, is the law of perfection, and therefore the real test and witness of faithfulness in the Religious Life.

We are dwelling, dear Sisters, on a very high line of thought, soaring even into the innermost recesses of the relations which connect the Eternal SON with the Eternal FATHER; and this not as an object to be adored as in a far distance, but as a pattern to be copied, and brought very near to us, as a law of life in which you are to have your share, and claim your privileges. For what constitutes the bond of Life between the FATHER and the SON in the Mystery of the Incarnation, this, though as a faint copy, must be the bond between your own soul and your LORD.

But be not disheartened, neither tremble at the thought. As you have received grace to give up all for Him, and have known what it is to love Him above all others, and to desire only to live to do His will for love of Him and of those for Whom He died, so be assured that He Who has given this primal grace, will with it also give all that was intended to follow, and for the sake of which the first grace was given. And it is surely your blessedness to feel that you are to be drawn along the same course by which your LORD was perfected, and know some measure of the same joy that He knows in union with His FATHER.

Learn then practically the spirit of life which your LORD has set before you. The same ceaseless desire, the same listening heart, the waiting, the quick, ready response, that you may feel, and think, and speak, and do, according to His mind, longing to be ever found in Him, rejoicing at every fresh impression from Him,

counting it your highest praise to attain ever more and more a closer likeness to Him, tarrying patiently for the accomplishment of this one desired end, and keeping before your mind the elevating, inspiring thought of what that likeness will be when it is perfected in you—this is the true law of a Sister's growth. All that she allows or desires ought to be but a reproduction in herself of what she beholds in her LORD, of what the Holy One dwelling in her reveals of His Divine perfection. As you attain the attentiveness of the inward heart, the quickness of the inner sight, the pliability of the secret will—as your whole being becomes more and more receptive of the power of the Vision ever before the eyes of your soul, so your life will advance, in that proportion you will draw closer to the end and aim of your Vocation.

Some few suggestions following from these principles I would add.

(1.) First, it is evident that the growth of such a life must necessarily be very gradual. There will also be many lets and hindrances. There may be even times of decline, or of stagnation, and you may have to confess sad fallings that will cause shame and sorrow. There may be on the other hand seasons of rapid advance, and sudden unexpected successes, and startling realizations of the powers of grace in which GOD appears to reveal Himself in His might, enabling you to bear or do what nature most shrinks from and abhors.

But such experiences whether of loss or gain, are, be it remembered, but incidents by the way, subordinate variations in a general course, like the risings or recedings of the passing wave in the tidal stream of the deep sea. The current of life flows on secretly beneath

these transient fluctuations. Therefore neither be presumptuous, nor lose courage. However slow your step may be, however slight the impressions of grace, however faint the sign of progress, remember that, even at its least, it is a miracle of grace, a wonderwork of Divine Love.

Most marvellous, O Good Lord, are Thy gracious influences! The most wonderful of all Thy works is the moulding of a soul according to Thy own Will; forming it for Thyself, till at last it takes the very shape of Thine own Glorious Life!

Be not even disheartened though you discern no progress, if only there be the constant tendency onwards. On the other hand, be astonished and rejoice if the faintest shadow of the portrait of the Life of Jesus be traced on you by the Hand of God, if at all it be really manifesting itself within you. It is enough, we cannot doubt, to call forth the adoring praise of Angels, who, if they "rejoice over one sinner that repenteth," must still more eagerly and delightedly watch the working of the grace of their God in perfecting His Sanctity in those who aspire to attain the higher standards of the Heavenly life, and rejoice with "joy unspeakable and full of glory" at the least realization of its greatness. And surely to your own souls such tokens of His Work within you may be treasured as joyous anticipations of a Glorious Eternity!

(2.) Again, it must be observed that the developing likeness of Christ in a soul, grows mostly without the soul itself being able to discern it. When the artist is employed in painting a portrait, a looker-on is for a long time unable to discern any resemblance to the model, generally not till the last touches are given does

he see any satisfactory result. But the artist himself knows all the while that the lines are tending to produce his desired end, and in the apparently misshapen forms his creative mind sees the perfect image that will at last be manifest to all. So in the soul of the Religious, the lines, the features of the character of CHRIST may be steadily forming, though she herself be unable to perceive it, and fears to anticipate. And indeed but few, if any, discern its progress, though it may be clear to the eye of the Almighty Spirit Who is filled with the purpose of His own finished Work. Or, as in a garden plants are long growing hiddenly, underground, in the extension and strengthening of their roots, while the stalk and its branches are restrained, and scarce seem to increase, and can only afterwards in an advanced stage mount upwards, and even then their growth is more by night than by day, while the expansion of the petals of the flower waits for the full shining of the daylight, so in the soul's highest life its multiform structure developes and grows secretly, its manifestations and outward beauty are the consequences of a long, patient, unseen discipline, and to the last there is need to wait for their full development, even till the time when the "Sun of Righteousness" shall have arisen in the perfect splendour of the World to come.

(3.) Once more—all that has been said proves how essential to the progress of your life it is, to keep the Blessed Vision of your LORD steadily before your eyes. While you gaze on this Vision as the standard and pattern of your inward life, you cannot but be faithful. Cherish earnestly therefore this inward grace of contemplation of the sacred Form into which your life is to be moulded. And this not merely at stated times of

meditation, when you have gone apart from outward things, and ordinary claims on your attention are suspended, but as a habit, feeding upon it, thinking, speaking, acting in the power of the contemplation, till it becomes a second nature, for the soul however busily employed may be ever looking at JESUS, ever listening to Him, ever joyous in embracing the impressions through which, whether consciously or not, the growing Likeness is being ingrained into the substance of the soul, while yet its plastic activities are going forth in appointed duties.

In the earth's atmosphere there is often a higher current of air contrary to the current blowing in its lower regions, and by degrees the higher current prevails over the lower, and the wind sets uniformly at last in the direction which took its rise from above. So, often, the more secret and hidden tendency of the soul's life is at variance with the passion that has been temporarily aroused, or the impulse suddenly stirred in the lower nature, and this higher tendency will at last prevail. You must be slow to judge by temporary faults, however needful to guard against them, however necessary to dread anything inconsistent with your Vocation. Above all, take good heed to preserve beneath the absorbing interests of the moment, beneath the urgent pressure of important work, beneath the keen sensibilities of self-consciousness, the Vision of the Life of JESUS, that sooner or later after every passing disturbance it may prevail, and become the settled law of life, with all its blessed anticipations of coming glory.

O LORD, do Thou reveal Thyself more and more to those who thus seek after Thee, who are consecrated to

be formed after Thy perfect Mind! Remove all that hinders the clear vision of Thy Beauty—incline the souls of all to hold such ceaseless communion with Thee that Thy likeness may grow and develope in them. Grant them power to maintain the consciousness of Thy Indwelling Presence in the midst of all outward disturbance. Work in them such pliancy of will, that Thy Hand may have free play to stamp on them the features of Thy Life, the characters of Thy Mind, that Thou mayest be pleased in them, even as the FATHER was well pleased as He beheld Thee, the Only Beloved, "the Brightness of His Eternal Glory!" Amen.

V.

THE ENERGY.

We have been considering, dear Sisters, those deeper principles which mark the truth of a Religious Vocation, and are to the soul of the Religious "the well of water springing up unto everlasting life." We have seen that the laws of Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience are but mere forms, unless instinct with powers of life quickening them into vital bonds of union with Christ in supernatural power. We have seen how the main elements of this inner quickening spirit may be gathered up under three heads, covering the whole extent of a Religious Vocation. Of these three heads two have already been considered,—love, the cause of the first movements towards the Religious Life, and, secondly, the imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the standard and rule of its progress. We have also seen how these principles connect the soul of the Religious with the First and Second Persons of the Blessed Trinity,—love, its first principle, with God the Father, the primary Source of life, and the practical imitation of Jesus Christ with Himself, the Eternal Son, Whose Humanity was perfected by His ceaseless correspondence with the Will of the Father, that He might be the pattern of His Elect people.

A third point remains to be considered, the active

energy of a Sister's life. By this I mean her activity whether in relation to her soul's interior acts, or to her outer work and influence upon others. This third element connects the soul of the Religious with the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, God the Holy Ghost.

In order to discern this truth we must consider what characterises the relation of the Holy Ghost on one side to the First and Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, and on the other to the creature. The Holy Ghost viewed under one aspect goes forth within the Divine Nature to perfect the Holy Trinity, binding the Father with the Son in the closest Unity. Viewed under the other aspect the Same Divine Person is the ministrant of the Divine Nature, communicating the Life of the Godhead, Himself the Giver and the Gift, to develope and perfect the creature.

It was the Holy Ghost Who first moving "upon the face of the waters," replenished the barren and dark void with all the varied elements of life, order, and beauty, quickening them according to their several degrees of perfection. The Holy Ghost was the active Agent, through Whose operation within the Virgin's womb the Son of God became Man, and took His place among the creatures, their Head and Crown of Glory. He was the active Agent through all the changes of the Incarnation, co-operating with the Son of God, enduing the Sacred Humanity of our Lord with Its growing powers, till He attained His complete glorification. He is the Life-giving power of Sacraments, and thus the Diffuser of the communicative graces of the Incarnation to all who share them.

The Holy Ghost is the Inspirer, the Illuminator,

the Replenisher, of all souls which seek after God; the bond likewise between God and all souls which live in Him. As He is the Regenerator, so also He is the confirming, strengthening, perfecting energy of Life wherever God has willed in His Predestination to communicate Himself, forming life after His own Mind, to be for ever one with Himself. He it is Who all through the realms of Creation is at work surmounting obstacles, removing hindrances, converting, transforming, completing after the pattern eternally conceived in the Mind of God, whatever is "made willing in the Day of His power." It is the Holy Spirit's peculiar mission in the realms of Creation to perfect it in God.

You will therefore readily see, dear Sisters, how the Holy Ghost is the Archetype of the true Sister's life in respect of her active operations, whether within the regions of her own mind and heart, or without herself in her relations to all that is around her wheresoever her influence extends. As the Holy Ghost is the energy of God, ever at work in the actual formation and completion of life everywhere, in the lowest as in the highest regions, so in a Sister's life, whether it be passed in contemplation and the internal exercises of prayer, as a flame ceaselessly aspiring heavenwards, or, as your lot is cast, in a mixed life of prayer and loving service for the good of the suffering and the helpless, there needs to be a like action, a similar mission of spiritual energy, animating and forming your own souls, and together with you the souls of those upon whom you are acting, to unite both yourselves and them with the Life of God.

Your mixed form of Religious Life has its perfect archetype, as in your Lord its true Example Who in

Himself combined laborious service with contemplative prayer, so also in the Holy Ghost, from Whom emanates "the spirit of prayer and supplication," "the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father," "the groanings which cannot be uttered," and at the same time the "liberty" which gives itself with unstraitened ease and power to do and bear the Will of God, freely, energetically, rejoicingly, in perpetual ministrations of active service.

The Holy Spirit is the indwelling activity alike of all effectual devotion, and of all good works. And this mingled energy is to mark you, dear Sisters, and its object is like to that of the Ever Blessed Spirit,—to attract, to win, to touch hearts, to subdue opposition, to remove obstacles, to inspire love, to form graces, to stimulate and to direct all that is "pure and lovely and of good report," supplying wants, suggesting motives, confirming resolutions, strengthening what is weak, bringing back what is gone astray, binding ever afresh the cords of charity, holding fast and perfecting in God what will be your rejoicing, as it will be His also, in the day of the triumph of His Grace.

Let us dwell somewhat more fully on some of the characteristics of the true working of this Divine energy of life, the signs by which you may judge whether you are tending in this respect also to perfect your Vocation.

(1.) One such sign is the effort to maintain the activity of your life, and the power of grace which God has given you, whenever there is felt, as will at times be the case, the tendency to decline. The Divine energy in itself is perpetual and ceaseless. One marvel that strikes the thoughtful mind is the unweariedness

with which God works among His creatures, notwithstanding the opposition, the ingratitude and neglect which He perpetually meets with in His intercourse with them. His operations are co-extensive with His predestination. It is the character of the Divine Nature to persevere in the hope of perfecting what He has begun, and accomplishing what He has purposed, though the contradictions of sin and the untractableness of the creature may lengthen out the time, and often cause changes in the guidings of His Will. Nor does any opposition or even contempt weary Him. His work is as constant and as true in this wayward struggling scene as in the peace of the unfallen world. His one law is what our Lord announced when He said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

If, then, in the life of the Religious there is to be a likeness to the Life of God; if her activity is to be a copy however faint of her Lord's; if there be in her the energy of a Divine Vocation, given to her not for herself only, but for others whom God would bless through her, then her life would be marked more and more by this character of unweariedness, even under disappointment, by longsuffering under opposition, by loving persistence under all forms of trial, "by patient continuance in well-doing" under failure. And this same spirit ought to endure according to her measure, though weakened health or advancing age may render former efforts less and less possible, seeking even in languishing sickness and on the dying bed to preserve the same tendency of spiritual desires, though it may be to be spent only in intercession and thanksgiving, in accents of prayer and praise, but still in union with the Divine operation, even when deprived of the powers of active

ministry. This joyous service, if true to the Will of God, would be ever seeking fresh openings, filling up deficiencies, reaching forth to things that are before, spending and being spent according to your power, yea, and beyond your power, ever casting yourself on the promised grace, on strength beyond your own, in the consciousness of resting on the "Rock that is higher than I," in trust that God is enthroned within your heart, and that in the going forth with Him, whatever be the amount of success, your mission is fulfilled. This is the working out of the active side of the Religious Life. It is the mystery of God, that His heavenly Treasure is lodged in "earthen vessels," to be exercised often by weakest instruments, it may be in their apparently feeblest hour, yet by which deeds are done and sufferings borne, which startle the world, and justify the faith that "the excellency of the power is of God and not of us."

(2.) Another sign of Divine energy in a Sister's life, one which affects her character as well as her work, is the endeavour to perfect all, even the least effort, with increasing exactness. On first entering the Religious Life, it is natural to lay hold of the grander, the more prominent features of the life, and to overlook details, perhaps to undervalue them, as of little moment. But it is a sure proof of a true life when the same energy which was so enthusiastic in seizing upon the broader principles is drawn to lay hold of the lesser features, and rightly estimate their importance. As this applies to a Sister's inner life, so also it applies to her outer service. To perfect her life, she must exhibit an increasing concern for its finer features, the minor details; making them objects of patient self-discipline. In all

her outward activities there should grow an increasingly fine perception of the bearings and consequences of word and action, an intelligent estimate of the relative value of the less as well as of the greater, for both are needful to complete the whole. Completeness is the surest sign that the Spirit of God has taken the soul captive to make its work one with His own. A merely partial influence of the Holy Spirit suffices to fix the energies of the soul on the more prominent forms of spiritual life, and to embrace principles. It is only as His work within advances, gradually possessing the whole being, that the same anxiety, the same earnestness, the same watchfulness, the same effort, extends to all details, as they are successively discerned, all alike being seen to be capable of the glory of God, alike necessary to manifest His Will, alike therefore part of an accomplished Vocation.

(3.) A third sign of progress closely connected with the one just mentioned, is the growing tendency to apply great principles to little things, not with a view to punctiliousness, still less to severe or captious judgments of others, but with the purpose of raising details of service to a higher level, and quickening the discernment of imperfections, whether in oneself or in one's work. It is characteristic of the Holy Ghost that He "searcheth all things, yea, even the deep things of God;" that He is "a discerner of the heart," the "convincer of sin," "piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit." Fineness of perception, penetration of judgment, is a true characteristic of His work. The lowliness therefore which meekly accepts the least suggestion of imperfection, the sweetness which quickly sets about the correction of any irregularity, however made

known, the pliability which welcomes any reproof, even though uncouthly given, the simplicity which sees in another's censure the gain to one's own soul as worth any amount of passing trial; the prompt correspondence with every opportunity of improvement, counting no care too much for the attainment of the very least advance to a more perfect spirituality of word and act—all such indications are as the preludes of the delicious harmony in some grand symphony which enchants the soul, long pained by the discords of the outer world, with an exquisite delight. The growing consciousness of increasing perfection in detail suffuses with an unspeakable joy the heart longing for communion with GOD, even here in this lost estate of His fallen creatures.

(4.) Another sign of abiding truth and reality of progress, even under unfavourable outward circumstances of fault or imperfection, is a sense of joy, in the very fact that the soul is bound to GOD by indissoluble ties, whatever the present burden, or apprehension as to the future, may be. Depression, cloudings of heart, unsuspected strugglings and doubts, even to the verge of despair, there may be, in which the Hand of GOD touching the soul may be discerned, constituting necessary phases of discipline to chasten the soul for Himself; echoes of the desolation that fell upon the Heart of JESUS in the Garden, which had the twofold end of drawing out the perfect virtues of His human nature, and accomplishing the redemption of His elect. Such are the calls that are heard at times to share some portion of the Cross, "to fill up what remains of the sufferings of CHRIST," to be borne in union with Him by "His Body the Church." Yet within such passing

spiritual desolation there may be a secret gladness, a sense of God as one's own God, even to a fulness of trust and peace, in the midst of all alarms, with the feeling that one would change nothing, so that God may fulfil His perfect Will, that all may be given up, even as the first resolve was, not merely oneself, but the consolations also and longings which once seemed to be all one's life; that the soul may be wholly God's, and only what He wills. There may be a consciousness of entire union with God, though its brightness is darkened for the time; and if, when such trial is permitted, the changed aspect still finds the soul set upon earnest work, the truth of its purpose becomes the clearer, the reality of its dedication more complete.

(5.) One further sign of the energy of the soul in union with the Holy Spirit may be discerned in the growing calmness which is produced by the increase of the supernatural in the ordinary course of service. If the life of the Religious is indeed a copy of that of her Divine Lord; if there be a putting aside of nature for grace, of earthly things for Heavenly,—then that soaring upwards, that translation of itself, and of all that it approves and allows, to a higher sphere of thought, will impart its calm to all within and around, whether in the discipline of her own being, where the Divine Presence dwells, or in the active effort to overcome obstacles, sanctifying ordinary incidents, imparting an habitual tone to any task undertaken in the love of God. This grace of spiritual peace may be experienced in some measure even in the first essays of the life of the Religious; but as the issues of life develope, this power will exhibit itself more and more, entering into an ever-widening circle, taking up into itself commonest

details. The effect of such power would be not to think anything impossible that comes in the way of duty, not to despair of the possible fulfilment of whatever may be shown to the soul to be according to the Will of GOD; still ever hoping against hope, suffusing with the spirit of a higher world, even the failures and the errors of an imperfect state, assured that "the strength of GOD is ever made perfect in weakness."

Such, then, dear Sisters, are among the chief signs which mark the reality of the fellowship which connects your life with that of the most HOLY SPIRIT. By such tokens you may judge how far you are growing according to the Heavenly Pattern shown on the Mount. He Who has called you, He Whose eyes are as a flame of fire, is ever gazing into your inmost hearts, to see who resembles, and who fails to resemble, the Image which His SPIRIT has revealed to your souls. He is the All Merciful, though also the unerring Judge, and, in the intensity of His Desire to see the fulfilment of His work in you, He is jealous of defects. Remember always there is a course of trial foreordained, a line set along which He has predestined to guide you, for the disciplining and training of your life in Himself. Heaven and earth will flee away, even the Angels will be unable to bear the full glory of His presence when He arises to judge. If He were "extreme to mark what is done amiss, who could abide it?" But He knoweth "whereof we are made," and "He hath compassion on our infirmities." Only let the tendencies of your life be ever onward, upward, the intention ever pure, the resolves steadfast, that if He cut short the work He has begun in you, it may be "cut short in

Righteousness;" that, if it run out a lengthened course, it may be found at last to have accomplished His full purpose to the end.

Grant, O LORD, we beseech Thee, to supply all the needs of Thy children, of all Thy chosen flock. Guide them with the light of Thy Presence, that Thy Name may be glorified in them, and Thy promises of love have their blessed fruit, to Thy eternal praise.

VI.

THE LAW OF OBEDIENCE.

Dear Sisters, we have now entered upon the season[1] of watchfulness, of preparation for the return of our Lord, for Whom you look and wait, and therefore also a special time to consider the signs of your fitness to meet Him on His approach, to consider whether the Bride is adorning herself for her Bridegroom; whether if He were suddenly to reveal Himself, you could stand before Him with hope of an endless indissoluble union.

In order to this it is necessary for you to judge whether you are faithful to the pledges which bind you to your Lord, the promises which are upon your souls. Your hope of final union with your Lord depends on the resemblance which your character bears to His in oneness of heart and life. For your promises are but the outward expression of what is intended to be your inward state, not in themselves the ground of His approval, but only the visible signs and seals of your soul's resolve, the outspoken voice of the heart, even as in marriage the mutual promises are only the witness to each other of the settled purpose of the heart; they are but a lip service, a breath that passes away, unless they express the inner truth, the abiding fondness of love.

[1] The Sermon was preached at the beginning of Advent.

We have been considering the inner spirit of a Religious Vocation, and in taking this view of your life have necessarily touched on the laws which form its substance. But these are of such primary importance, that they need to be considered more fully and separately, though after what has been already said, it need be but briefly. First, then, let us dwell on the chief characteristic of your Profession, as it was the groundwork of the life of your LORD, the law of obedience.

I have shown before, dear Sisters, how the Mind of your LORD was ever steadfastly fixed on the Will of His FATHER; that in all things His Will was determined by His FATHER's Will, His daily Life, even in its least details, directed by that supreme rule of right and truth. It is so important to realise the extent to which this principle was carried, that I would remind you of some of the details, in which express mention is made of this habitual action of the Mind of our LORD. Was it a question, whither He should bend His steps in the course of His journeyings, the principle guiding Him was, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel."[1] Was it a question on a particular occasion whether or no He should fulfil the desire of some suffering petitioner, the thought was, "The SON can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the FATHER do."[2] Was a judgment to be expressed on some disputed case, still the same principle was at work; "As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is true, because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of Him Which hath sent Me."[3] Was it a question of suffering in kind or degree, the instant resolve was, "The cup which My FATHER hath given Me, shall I not drink

[1] S. Matt. xv. 24. [2] S. John v. 9. [3] S. John v. 30.

it?"[1] It was always the same, whether the point in question had reference to some pain to be endured, or to some action, or some mental decision, or a mere inward impulse. Our LORD had always a determining Rule before Him, and His mind was fixed upon that Rule. It was the Law of His Life. He gave Himself to fulfil it, as His Vocation. It was expressed by Himself in prophecy ages before, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O GOD; I am content to do it, yea, Thy law is within my heart."[2] His whole Life was a fulfilment of His avowed purpose, as He Himself said, that this or that was done, "that the Scriptures might be fulfilled," or that they "might not be broken." There was the constant expression of the same fixed idea. The earlier Scriptures contained the prophetic foreshadowing of what was to be fulfilled in the perfect accomplishment of our LORD's Life. Prophecy was but the presignification of His own Will in union with the Will of His FATHER.

Further, it was manifestly our LORD's intention that through the grace of His Incarnation this law of His Life should be perpetuated in His elect, should be communicated from Himself, to become a rule to be followed by those whom He should call to a like dedication. This principle of union founded on the law of obedience had indeed previously been shown forth in the "mystery" of marriage. In this sacred fellowship two were to become one flesh, two lives were to be harmonized in unity, and this union was founded on the subjection of the one to the other. It was said to the woman in the first institution of this mystery, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." And marriage was intended to be the type of a higher and

[1] S. John xviii. 11. [2] Ps. xl. 8.

greater truth, a yet more mystical union, first, "betwixt CHRIST and His Church," and within this wider circle between Himself and individual souls. The desire of this union has, through GOD's grace, become your one absorbing thought, surpassing all other ties; to be His, and to serve Him, your dearest choice. That this desire may be a reality, it is requisite that the aspirations of the soul may be always fixed upon Him, and the will taken captive by the attractions of His personal love according to the same laws of obedience which determined His own earthly state in union with His FATHER.

This habit of obedience is to be shown towards all those who are set over you according to the Rule of your Community, which for love of Him you have bound about your heart by solemn promises. Your Rule is the pattern of your life, to be followed as its guiding principle, as the Life of your LORD was modelled on the Mind of His FATHER. And as you look beyond the outward forms of your Rule, and realise the inner Life of your LORD, His obedience will become the animating example of your obedience, His self-renunciation, His spirit of subjection, the model of your service, and of the habitual obligations of your consecrated state.

The Rule of your Community is truly the law of your life, as though it had been given you by the Hand of your LORD, when He bound you to Himself. An earthly husband gives to his wife the guidance she is called to obey, the expression of his desire being to her the manifestation of the Will of GOD. As a wife surrenders herself to her husband, to "love, honour, and obey" him, she typifies what, as a spiritual reality, is to be fulfilled in your state of life as the expression of

your entire self-surrender to your LORD. The question for you is whether, if He appeared at this moment, resplendent in the glorious beauty of His Heavenly state, He would find you faithful to your promises, carrying out your obligations in willing correspondence with His known Will, faithful to your Betrothal; whether, if He came to judge you at this moment, He would find you ready to enter with Him into the everlasting mansions, the chambers of infinite bliss, where "His banner over you is Love," having been proved and found faithful in the day of your trial.

Further, this principle of obedience has a wider consequence. It is a saying of the great S. Gregory, that obedience has this singular power, that it introduces all other virtues in its train, and sustains them as they grow within the soul. The truth of this distinctiveness of the grace of obedience depends on a law regulating all Divine vocations, in that the attainment of virtue is the result of a state of will ever ready to receive what GOD reveals to the soul to be accomplished. The pliable and chastened state of the will is the condition of all advances in the spiritual life. If the will be in a state of contradiction, if there be an indisposition to conform readily to the calls of GOD; if the mind, seeing the virtue to be cherished, or the fault to be corrected, yet fails to follow the guiding of the HOLY SPIRIT saying to it, "This is the way, walk ye in it," it necessarily falls short of its Vocation. If, on the contrary, there be a quickness and a brightness of resolve in co-operating with the proffered grace, and making the necessary effort, the work of GOD advances ever more and more.

Suppose a will habitually yielding itself to Rule, ever

preserving an attitude of submission to calls of conscience, hour by hour humbling itself in delighted acceptance of the demands however made on it, then not only will the life be growing more perfect in obedience, it will at the same time be accumulating grace upon grace, and increasing in manifold impressions of a Divine character. The very fact of this continual self-surrender, this habitual compliance with the details of the law of sacrifice, fits the soul more and more for the varied gifts of grace necessary to the perfected union with God, even as our Lord, ever conforming His Will to the Will of His Father, to the utmost extent of self-renunciation, perfected His Humanity, and advanced from glory to glory. It is in like manner, dear Sisters, that you also, if thus watchful in the observance of the requirements of your Rule, keeping your minds fixed on the opportunities of self-sacrifice which it supplies, will be continually receiving, it may be quite imperceptibly, more and more of the knowledge and perfect Image of God, more and more of the beauty of holiness, more and more of the Mind of Christ. The soul that has accustomed itself to receive whatever thus comes to it as the Voice, and with the authority, of God, incessantly tends to be filled with the fulness of God.

This principle of obedience, if you would be like to your Lord, must be prompt and immediate, must learn to delight in the fulfilment of its treasured purpose. And if thus moved, as the Holy Spirit sheds His influence within the surrendered will, breathing over you an unction and a sweetness that ever attends the conscious sense of union with God, your life is growing unto perfection.

The joy of a Sister's life is the sense of loving and

being loved by her LORD, the having His Will, and not her own, as her guide, the having no wish or purpose but what is pleasing to Him, and thus tends to increasing union with Him. Filled with a loving purpose which she feels to be a response to His call, she is thus taken out of herself. As "the Spirit is life because of righteousness," so the Spirit is joy because of consciously accepted love, and love is ever known by its obedience and unselfish devotion.

Here, then, is one sure test to be weighed by you, dear Sisters, at this season while you are watching for the Coming of your LORD. Look anxiously at your soul's state in this respect. His eye rests specially on those among you who have so lately pledged yourselves to His service.[1] Remember how having passed your Novitiate, the obedience to your Rule must all the more depend on your own conscientiousness. The eye of a Superior cannot be everywhere as the eye of Him to Whom you are devoted; He alone can fully discern whether the obedience is of the heart, or only in the outward act. There are inner details and incidental circumstances in every action, like the fringes of the sacred garments, which only loving earnestness detects or values, as necessary to the perfection of your aim. Or, again, in seeking dispensations from your Rule, often the Eye "that seeth in secret" can alone judge truly whether there was a sufficient cause to warrant the request. No earthly Superior can in all cases determine whether some imperfect motive or needless self-indulgence may not lurk hidden beneath the seemingly reasonable claim. Your LORD, on the contrary,

[1] The allusion is to a Profession which had taken place a few days previously.

will be ever watching, and He never slumbers nor sleeps. He discerns all the secret movements of the soul. He tests the innermost motives of word and act. He alone can fix the unalterable sentence, as He alone can fully know how the pledged troth has been kept, how the first love has been cherished. He will bear witness before His FATHER in regard to the momentous question, which of you are following Him the more perfectly in that real and living Communion with Himself, in which the Eternal FATHER gave you to Him to be His Crown and His rejoicing for ever.

Try yourselves then by this test, and may He Whose step is ever drawing nearer and nearer towards you, find you waiting for Him with the lamp burning and the replenished oil in your vessels. When He cometh forth in the splendour of His Glory, may He then find in you that conformity of will which He desires, may you be continually increasing in the truth of your Profession, and so adorning yourselves for the marriage of the Lamb, the completed oneness, the fulness of joy in His Presence, when accomplished hope and satisfied love shall minister to an eternal ecstasy of bliss—the enduring recompense of a loving service and patient waiting, which failed Him not in the hour of your trial, the abundance of glory crowning for evermore the promise of His Grace.

VII.

THE LAW OF POVERTY.

We have dwelt, dear Sisters, on one of the pledges you have given to your Lord, the promise of Obedience, and considered it as a test of your faithfulness in preparing for His expected approach, that you may meet Him when He comes, not with self-reproach and shame, but with joy and thankfulness. Let us now dwell on another pledge which you have likewise given to Him, equally characteristic of your Profession, equally a test by which to try yourselves, the promise of a life of Poverty.

In the case of Obedience we saw how your consecrated state is represented in marriage, because the law of obedience which binds the wife to her husband is like to the bond which binds you to your Lord, for in the Rule of your Community you recognise the Will of your Lord. To profess obedience to a Religious Rule does not constitute a mere human obligation; nor is it as if you were responsible merely to your Superior for its observance. It is an obligation binding on the conscience, for the observance of which you are responsible to your Lord. Freely has it been professed, and in the Profession bound upon the soul. The promise of the wife to "love, honour, and obey" her husband, freely given and accepted, represents your own

professed subjection to your LORD, to Whose service you have devoted yourselves.

I also observed that this law of voluntary obedience is especially to be taken to heart by Professed Sisters, as a test by which to judge themselves, because they are more dependent on the action of their own wills; they are more left to themselves and their own consciences. Novices are under a more immediate control, subject to a constant minute supervision, continually sustained by a support external to themselves, and liable to be called to account at any moment for the slightest breach of rule or lack of observance. This is indeed the very purpose and condition of a Novitiate, while, on the other hand, Professed Sisters are supposed to be already instructed and trained in the observances of the Rule and the principles of the Religious Life, and therefore fitted to persevere and advance without the same immediate control in the power of their devoted allegiance to their LORD.

Let us turn now to another law of the Religious Life, and this one that may be viewed under a similar aspect with that of Obedience, as alike represented in the marriage state. It is the law of marriage that the wife should be as her husband is, in her earthly condition. He bestows on her his "worldly goods," if possessed of any, or his penury, if he be destitute. If he is noble, he invests her with his nobility; if he be a commoner, whatever her own social condition may be, he connects her with his own estate. His name, his kindred, his mode of living, becomes hers also. Even if she be by birth of higher state and dignity, she yet practically surrenders it, adapting herself to his circumstances, associating with his family,

as one of them. She is both outwardly and inwardly identified with him in her whole earthly destiny, and this all the more truly in proportion as she loves and is faithful to her vow. The closer her inward union with her husband, her whole individuality is the more merged in his whom she has chosen.

Let us apply this to your own case. You, dear Sisters, have chosen a poor husband, and therefore like Him must be poor. He chose to be poor because He loved you. He was not always so. He might have continued as He was from all eternity, but of His own free love and self-devotion, He willed to be what He condescended to assume in His adopted nature, and this for your sakes. You, too, may have been different once, and might have remained different, but you chose for His sake to cast in your lot with Him, to be as far as you could be wholly one with Him, seeking only to be what He was content to be on earth, wishing for no other destiny. He had all the riches of Heaven for His own, yet He willed on earth to have "nowhere to lay His Head." He might have commanded even "the stones" to become "bread," but He willed rather to hunger. There were subject to Him all "dominions, principalities, and powers," to be His ministers, but He chose poor fishermen to be His companions and His friends. He was sought for, that He might be made a king, but He would have no coronet, except a crown of thorns. He descended from His Throne in Heaven to be a wanderer and an outcast. He forsook His glory to be called by evil names, and aspersed with contumely. As His earthly life drew to a close, the destitution of His state deepened around Him. His food was the chance provisions put into the bag carried by His dis-

ciples. His one possession was the garments which He wore. At last He had but gall and vinegar to drink; and they stripped Him even of His raiment. His death was what His Life had been, only a still profounder manifestation of the strange excess of poverty; all that He possessed literally surrendered to others' will, all that He was to endure dependent on others' choice. There was nothing that He called His own; even His Name and Character self-abandoned, His very Life given to be "a ransom for many." A stranger's tomb received His crucified Body.

I have in a former address observed that Religious Poverty does not mean destitution or penury, but the abandonment of your own possessions, to live as the Community may will. But remember further, that in becoming Sisters you have not merely surrendered your independence, choosing to have only what is appointed for you, limiting your desire to what may be permitted. It is not merely that all outward things are to be held in subjection, and that this same principle extends to all your daily life and work. There is this further consequence, that your Profession may involve any lowly form of service, the most entire sacrifice of self-pleasing, the sharing of the commonest menial task, the abandonment of what nature most fondly clings to. Even as it was with your Lord, so it may be with yourselves who are devoted to Him. Such in its essential principle is the requirement of your Rule. Religious Poverty extends to your inner mind equally as to your outward state. In binding yourself to your Lord, and conforming your state to His, you have renounced not only the desire of riches, but also the desire of human praise, of superiority of

place, of homage, of respect. Outward consideration, place of honour or power, may come or not, as the "lot is cast into the lap," but such objects can never rightly be your aim, nor their loss the ground of inward repining. They are renounced in your very choice of your LORD as the husband of your soul. For He knew them not, and you for love of Him have abandoned the very knowledge of them. Poverty of mind is included in your self-devotion, as well as poverty of outward state. The principle embraces the whole range of your mental being together with your bodily condition. The same spirit in which you put aside all mere externals as nothing in themselves, virtually also puts off from you in your obligation to Religious Poverty, what clings yet more deeply to the sensibilities of nature, the choice or desires of the lower will, all that constitutes what the Apostle includes under the idea of the "pride of life," the world within the heart. And this Scriptural warning applies in your case not merely to things evil and corrupt, but to what is lawful in the order of the world, though by you self-abandoned, because alien to your heart's true choice, when you chose Him Who voluntarily renounced them, and has now called you to a like state. Things indifferent to others were surrendered by you, together with your social state and this world's ties, when you placed your hand into the Hand of your LORD, and said, "What Thou art, I would be; Thy lot shall be mine; where Thou goest, I would go; what Thou lovest, I would love; Thy choice shall be my choice; my life for ever one with Thine."

It is part of our common dignity as Christians, that we have to do with One Who regards the heart equally

as the external actions, Who values not so much what is given up for His sake, as the spirit in which it is given; Who looks at the inner secret purpose conforming itself to His Will, more than at the amount of the offering. And this truth has an important bearing on two distinct points touching your inner life.

(1.) It applies to those who had much in their power to offer, much that it was painful to leave. The real value of any offering is in the love that makes the offering. No gift or sacrifice weighs in the balance equally with the love that prompted the gift and inspired the sacrifice. The secret stirrings of the soul, the inner longings of your devotion, the lavish prodigality of love which laid the offering at His Feet and abandoned to His call what was once dearly treasured, were beyond all expression greater in His sight than if you had kingdoms to bestow, or worlds of highest delight to leave.

(2.) The same principle equally applies to those who have less or it may be nothing outwardly to offer, nor aught which they cared to surrender. You remember the value your Lord set on the widow's two mites. He honoured and loved her gift, because it was her all, "all her living." It is always so. He measures not as we measure. He does not estimate, as we do, the outward appearances of things. His eyes penetrate the inmost spirit, and if He there sees true love, pure generosity of desire, the entire longing to be only His, the gift is always precious in His sight. In the gift of oneself He sees all that one would desire to accompany the gift. Rich or poor are alike in His sight, if the hearts of both are alike given to Him. He treasures the plighted troth of the one equally as that of the other.

He has the same sympathy with either, if there be the same willingness of sacrifice. He embraces both with a love as deep, as rich in the sweetness of acceptance and of loving joy, if His gracious call has met a like fond response, though the outward difference may be great.

Moreover, bear in mind, dear Sisters, lest there yet remain a defect marring all your offerings, that neither in any sacrifice, nor in all your service, have you laid God under any obligation, or that aught you do or can do constitutes any claim upon Him. It is not as if God owed you anything because of the offerings which you bring, for whatever the gift, whatever the sacrifice, it was of pure grace, out of simple favour towards you, that He either quickened within you the desire, or gave you the loving will to offer.

Rather the cause for gratitude is all on your side; that you have been chosen; that He has called you; that He has put it into your heart to feel as you have felt, to do as you have done, to be what you are, or what you long and purpose to be. He has caused you to see the comparative nothingness of earthly love and earthly care, of wealth or pleasure, or, dearer still, the freedom of unshackled choice, in comparison with the unseen chains of love, that bind you straitly to Himself. The love of His perfect sacrifice, of His self-abandoned lot; the preferring in all things what is eternal to what is temporal, what is spiritual to what is carnal, what is heavenly to what is earthly—this has been His gift to you. Gratitude is due from you to Him, because He has vouchsafed to give you the preternatural grace which has enabled you to rise to this high choice, and in the power of your Vocation to cast away all

that is less than Himself in the foretaste of an everlasting union with Him, nay, in the consciousness even now that you may serve Him continually, "without distraction," without any rival in your heart. The power of such a choice is the precious gift of God, and it is His choice of you that caused this power to spring up in your heart, drawing you to His side, binding about you as a girdle the endless chain of love that enthrals you, that thrills through your heart as He draws you wholly and undividedly to Himself, to make you all His own.

A caution here is needed. There is a frequent tendency in natural impulses to seek to reassert their hold upon the heart, even after they have been laid upon the Altar of God as a willing sacrifice. Even under a religious semblance former faults tend to revive. When they would be readily repressed if appearing under their former and well-known aspect, they may deceive by some new form, and possibly one of apparent spirituality. The same desires that once were stirred by earthly objects—pride, for instance, in some good work accomplished, or longings for ease without any real need of rest, or desire of notice because of some deed done, or eagerness for position under the idea of accomplishing more for God, or sensitiveness as to others' good opinion out of mere self-pleasing, or self-choosing under cover of higher spiritual aims, or restlessness from self-indulgent longings under the semblance of greater self-sacrifice—such impulses, changed indeed in their outward character and aspect, from change of outward circumstances and objects, but the very same in essence and in kind, and in themselves as truly of the world, and purely natural, may reassert

much of their former power. They are indeed but the old life, which was renounced, reappearing under new conditions, subtle attempts of the old enemy to find an entrance into a state which all the while by its every claim ceaselessly protests against all such tendencies. While all speaks outwardly of the law of Poverty, the inward spirit, and even the allowed expression of the lips, may perhaps at times unconsciously betray the heart as yet not fully surrendered, not yet conformed to the perfect call of GOD, not wholly one with the Mind of CHRIST.

Watch then still eagerly to detect any latent, lurking fault, and be ready to catch even the least hint or suspicion of imperfection, if you would be prepared for the coming of the Bridegroom, seeking in His long-treasured love to claim you as His chosen ones, and present you faultless to His FATHER to be glorified with Him for ever. See that your state of Poverty be accepted in its full power by your whole being after the Pattern of your LORD, though according to the measure of your feeble and frail condition. The Bride must be as the Bridegroom. One who is called to take her place at His side must be of the same spirit. One who has breathed a perfect response to His call must be true to her Profession. The "I will" that binds the soul pledged to unite itself with Him Who gave Himself wholly, unreservedly, in love and self-devotion, ought to be fulfilled with a like faithfulness. The law of the Life of JESUS ought to be hers also.

Watch therefore earnestly to see that the spirit of this life is being accomplished in you according to His Will. Remember that He is a "jealous GOD," that He is the more jealous over those whom He hath called to

the closest fellowship with Himself; that His Honour is more at stake, more committed to their truth, as His Glory is the more exalted in their faithfulness. He and His cause are specially put to shame in those who have pledged their troth in a high calling and failed Him; who might have remained not so pledged, but drawn by the sweetness of desire and the power of His grace, have professed their love, yet fail to fulfil their promises. Rather may you be quickened to accomplish the end for which He called you, that you may rejoice in His approach with joy unspeakable and full of glory; your hopes fully realised in His appearing in His Majesty, when His Glorious Beauty shall be revealed, Whom you have loved above all others, Whose attractions drew you to cast all aside, that you might be the crown of His rejoicing in that Day. So may He find in you the reflexion of that same beauty, knowing even as you are known, loving even as you have been loved, and in the fulfilment of all pure desires, at rest and rejoicing for ever.

VIII.

THE LAW OF CHASTITY.

We are again preparing, dear Sisters, for the commemoration of the ineffable Mystery of the Incarnation.[1] We are led to look intently forward to the visible manifestation of our Lord in His Glorious Majesty as He will be unveiled at His Second Coming. Our subject has the closest affinity with thoughts which must be thrilling through your hearts at such a season. What I have been so frequently pressing on you is—are you ready for His approach? Are you faithful to the pledges which you have given to Him? Are you truly what you professed yourselves to be, His only, His now, and for ever?

We have already dwelt on two of the great principles characterising your state, Obedience to be shown forth in faithfulness to your Rule as the expression of the Will of your Lord to which you have subjected yourselves; and Poverty to be exhibited in perfect conformity and contentment with your lot, thus exhibiting, so far as you are able, your Lord's earthly condition, and unity of mind with His Mind. Let us now consider the third great principle, the yet more intimate bond which binds you to our Lord, that which enters

[1] This Lecture was delivered immediately before Christmas Day.

more deeply into your Life than either of the two already considered—the law of Chastity. Obedience and Poverty are comparatively external things when contrasted with this grace, which equally concerns the soul and the body. It constitutes the most intimate ground of separateness from earthly ties and of personal union with our LORD.

According to its strict meaning Chastity implies all that we understand by "chastening," when this term is taken in its fullest sense. They are, in fact, kindred terms. Chastity is but the chastened discipline which constrains the inner springs of passion, imposing a spiritual rule over the senses and secret avenues of thought, and subduing all impulses so that grace may prevail over nature's desires. There is chastity in pure married life, which has its own sacredness and dignity in the kingdom of GOD. But virgin or widowed chastity is a special "gift;"[1] and when consecrated to Him and chosen for the love of CHRIST, that both soul and body may be more perfectly His, to serve Him "without distraction," it is an anticipation of the heavenly state, where "they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels." When chosen as an abiding portion, as it is in the Religious Life, it constitutes a peculiar and sacred alliance with our LORD, of which marriage is a type. We have seen how marriage binds closely and indissolubly, in mysterious unity, those who once were completely separate. We have seen how obedience to the husband, and oneness of social condition, which are essential features of the married state, have their counterpart in the Obedience and Poverty which bind the

[1] See the Preface of the Service for Holy Matrimony.

Religious, through the Rule which she is pledged to keep to her LORD. A precisely similar resemblance will be found in respect of that law of the Religious Life which we are now considering. There is a spiritual alliance between our LORD and the soul which has chosen to serve Him in response to His Call, like to that bond of union which in marriage causes the man and the woman to be "one flesh."

Let us consider this great principle in your Life, dear Sisters, that at His appearing you may be found faithful to Him Whose Jealousy burns as "a flame of fire."

There are three points more specially to be noted in considering this sacred alliance. (1) The choice; (2) The binding of the bridal tie; (3) The mutual intercourse in which it is fulfilled.

(1.) And first, with regard to the choice. What is the drawing to the Religious Life but the movement of the soul responding to the choice of GOD predestined from all eternity, and in time revealing itself to the soul,—GOD singling out, according to His good pleasure, one or another, by a wondrous preference, drawing the soul to Himself by a special, individual calling, and the soul, on its own part, feeling itself thus drawn, and yielding itself up in compliance with His call, as the truest, happiest course of life? GOD speaks secretly by His Spirit to each soul, witnessing to His purpose, setting before it one prominent idea as the hope and joy of life. He points out the special work to be done for Him. He foreshadows the assurance of satisfaction and rest in a faithful compliance with His call. By the attractions of His grace the soul is drawn to love, to accept, to cleave to the ideal thus presented to it. Under this influence, one earthly tie after

another is unloosed, one doubt after another dispelled, all drawings of a restless fancy at variance with it pass away, all fears and apprehensions troubling the prospect are hushed to rest. A sense of liberty unknown before raises the soul into regions of thought which by degrees wholly captivate it. The soul yields itself up to the desire of undivided devotion, the will being centred on the one absorbing aim, breathing fondest hopes, glowing with increasing fervour.

Such is the interpretation of the call in the Canticles, "Come into my garden, my Sister, my Spouse." The garden is the enclosure within which the soul holds undivided intercourse, as in a place of secret delight, with her LORD, in the midst of all that stirs and attracts her spiritual desires. GOD is the first moving cause of this influence. Outward Providences combining with inward inclination and dispositions, different lines converging to the one end, the outward and the inward mutually interpreting each other, constitute its manifestation. They confirm His Will, while He draws the heart to embrace it. And as He Himself is the moving cause, so also He is the inward power, enabling the soul to give itself, while taught to "apprehend" as it is "apprehended of Him." His aspirations breathed within the soul corresponding with His appointments without, GOD and the soul are thus associated in the common choice, to be fulfilled in the purest communion of love.

(2.) Next follows the binding of the bridal tie. In the inward dedication of a Religious to her LORD, there are, as in marriage, two distinct stages, the one preparatory to the other, and incomplete till succeeded by the other. As in marriage, the betrothal and the

marriage vow are distinct, so in the Religious Life the Novitiate is distinct from the Profession. The betrothal is the intention of the fulfilment of the desire, while yet there is the possibility of some hindrance intervening, some difficulty unforeseen marring the accomplishment. So in a Novitiate there is the opportunity given for all possible hindrances to be weighed, and the testing, which proves the soul's stability, to be undergone. The object of this preparatory state is partly to know more perfectly the groundwork of the soul's desires and aspirations, lest the drawings of God be misinterpreted, and the soul pledge itself unalterably to a life for which it may have no real and abiding fitness; partly to train and mature such desires, if real and effectual.

The pledges of a life-long union follow, as the further act to which the preparations of the Novitiate have led, and these involve the entire surrender of the soul, thus accomplishing its purpose, and of all it holds most dear, to be sealed by mutual promises. The marriage tie is indissoluble, except by death—"till death us do part" —and such is intended to be the enduring result of the union of the Professed with her Lord, or rather to be exalted in the spirit soaring through death and beyond death to a yet more complete fulfilment of her desires in the world within the veil, in a visible communion and a perfected love. Such pledges are met by an assurance of unfailing support. For there is in such a surrender of oneself to God a trust, which all true love implies, a trust which embraces an assurance of aid and sympathy proportioned to the need. In the binding of the ties between the soul and its Lord, which constitutes a Profession, there is the assurance

that each will be to the other what they were not before. There is the binding of a true and lasting covenant. The soul which God has thus called and drawn to Himself from thenceforth leans on Him with an assured confidence, as it accepts His Will, whatever that Will may demand, and shares His lot, whatever that lot may be, trusting to His loving care to be its guide, its peace, its consolation.

Such devotion will necessarily be tested in manifold ways, in conflicts and in fear, in loneliness and in sorrow. In such trial the faithful will be bound all the more closely, and, as the soul leans upon its Lord, unchangeably bound to Him, so He cares for such a soul with a very special care, sustaining it in its purposes, revealing Himself in His loving-kindness, granting special manifestations of His love, never leaving nor forsaking it, according to His promise. And this fulness of His grace implies a union of love and joy in Himself, to be more and more perfectly fulfilled through the endless ages of eternity.

(3.) This bond of union involves as an essential part of the covenant, the society, the constant fellowship of loving sympathy, which is the joy of mutually attested love. What the husband is to the wife of his bosom, God has promised to be to the soul which gives itself wholly to Him, or rather, infinitely more. To the soul which gives itself to Christ to "serve Him without distraction," to share His lot, surrendering joys of earth, to be more perfectly and undividedly one with Himself, our Lord promises "an hundredfold now in this world, and in the world to come eternal life."[1] It is a promise that the soul thus united with Him in

[1] S. Mark x. 30; S. Matt. xix. 29; S. Luke xviii. 30.

will and desire, will find in Him a place of refuge and of rest, a retreat within His Sacred Heart, whither it may go apart to be alone with its LORD, claiming as of right, because of the bridal tie, an ineffable fellowship of love, a covenanted fulness of all that He has pledged in Himself, the bright inheritance of His own Elect.

It is according to the requirements of such a bond of union that you, dear Sisters, need to judge yourselves when you consider your present condition, and think whether or no you are prepared to meet your LORD with joy at His coming. Let me urge upon you these considerations.

(1.) Try yourselves, first, as to how you cherish this bond of union, and whether you seek to strengthen it by all means in your power. For this heavenly oneness, like all earthly friendships, needs to be sustained and deepened by the exercise of loving intercourse. In the natural life love is sustained and deepened by sensible sympathies, by the eye, the ear, the voice, the touch, by the communion of spoken thoughts and mutual wishes, and infinitely varied tokens of loving consideration and care. How are these manifest effects of sight, and sound, and felt means of intercourse, to be supplied in the spiritual life? How is the sense of common joys and sorrows, of mutual toil or rest, which in friendship or married life, a glance, a passing word is sufficient to express, how is such instinctive fellowship in the life of the soul to be preserved? It is by secret glances of the heart's trust, by the rising up of spiritual desires, by renewed purposes of growing spirituality, by retreating continually into the Presence of your LORD, by vivid acts of recollection, by referring

all cares and troubles to His sympathy, laying all burdens upon His Heart, and drawing from His promises ever-renewed strength; by prayer and meditation, by keeping the soul hour after hour in His sight, and so being ever ready to receive the indications of His Will in the light of His love. By such means the bond of spiritual union is evermore renewed, the inner joy of the love of JESUS cherished. The question, therefore, for you, dear Sisters, is whether such exercises have become a habit; how far, in your labours and outward duties, specially in seasons of difficulty or trial, you cherish this secret, active fellowship, and try to live in the power of this unseen but never-failing support?

(2.) Next, as to your outward practice. Consider how far this spirit, nourished by inner communion with your LORD, has been carried out practically in bringing your daily course into correspondence with His Mind? Are you faithful in sharing His lot, in suffering on His account, in making sacrifices as He continually offered Himself in sacrifice for you, in speaking according to His Spirit, and yielding your will to His claims of obedience? And do you carry out your purpose to be ever by His Side, to sit with Him as He rests by the way, to kneel with Him in prayer, to follow His Steps as He goes before you, bearing His Cross? How, in truth, do you fulfil this course, the law of your Profession? How far are you striving to resemble JESUS, your chosen Example and your LORD, in the manner and spirit of your life, and how, when called to suffer, do you regard those who are the instruments of your trial, it may be, quite unconsciously, as well as the circumstances which are but the blind and yet ordered expressions of His Will?

(3.) Again, in looking forward to the future, what are your cherished aims? On the plans you form, the thoughts you foster, the visions you delight in, rests your prospect of advance and faithfulness to the likeness of your LORD. The predominant ideas which possess your soul give the bent, the tenour to your whole life. Even the glory of the entrancing future takes its form and its brightness from the tendencies and the aspirations which you now encourage. The shadow of the future is ever being cast back upon the present. The soul in great measure determines its own destiny. Its anticipations may become the means as well as the symbols of its future advance.

(4.) And further, as to redeeming the failure of the past, this also must claim your constant thought. As one bound by love to another, often looks forward to the future to make up for the deficiencies of the past, ever forming fresh purposes to repair past errors, and, as by compensation, produce increased delight, so the Religious should continually consider, not how her path may be made smoother, or her service to her LORD easier, nor how she may be spared trial or self-sacrifice, but how she may compensate for past neglect; how her companionship with Him may be more real, her mind more assimilated, her desires more conformed, to His; how the same or like trials may be borne in a better spirit, the same burden with greater patience; how renewed efforts to please Him, renewed fervour to embrace His precepts, and more affectionate tenderness in His service, may animate all her daily conversation. And surely the soul that has bound itself to be one with JESUS, soul with Soul, spirit with Spirit, should have a constant impulse animating it, to lead

her onward, to draw her upward, to bind her always to the better choice, and fix her immoveably in the peaceful, restful regions, where Divine love reigns, and hope is melting into anticipative enjoyment.

Try yourselves, therefore, earnestly, by such tests, and may you find an everlasting entrance into the Joy of your LORD, when He comes to take His own Elect home to His Bosom in the Day of His Glory.

IX.

THE VIRGIN STATE.

Dear Sisters, among the many subjects connected with the mystery of the Incarnation of God, the Virgin Life is one which it brings into special notice, for the Virgin State characterises all who were immediately concerned with the accomplishment of this Mystery, all who ministered to its fulfilment, equally as our Incarnate Lord Himself. So closely does this subject touch your own life, that I am led to dwell upon it in some detail.

It is important to note that the Virgin State as a consecrated life, specially blessed of God, dates from the time of the Incarnation. It had indeed been exemplified before in the case of chosen individuals, in whom the coming mystery was shadowed before its fulfilment, but throughout the days of Israel, when the birth of the Messiah was looked forward to as woman's peculiar glory, the married state was regarded with highest favour, and as one specially dignified with covenanted promises. Only after the coming of Christ, in which woman's fond hopes had been fulfilled, did the Virgin State arise to claim its distinctive sacredness, and take its place in the kingdom of our Lord, endued with its special prerogatives. In venturing to touch on this high theme, while addressing you who are con-

secrated to this state, I would desire to speak with entire diffidence, trusting to the truer witness of your own experience, and the knowledge which is possessed only by those who, like yourselves, are by the grace of GOD called to it, and that you may supply out of your own consciousness what is lacking in me. I would in such a spirit speak to you in this and the following addresses of what your Virgin State involves, to what it ought to lead, the life proper to it, and what its glory when faithfully and religiously observed.

We trace the Virgin State, as I have observed, to the Home at Nazareth, as its true birthplace, the Home of the Blessed Mother of GOD, and S. Joseph; the Home, above all, of our LORD'S childhood and youth. The Virgin State existing before in type and shadow, partially and fitfully, flowed out from that central fount to be an abiding manifestation of grace. There had before been raised up Elias, and certain others devoted to this same state of life, but the great Prophet was caught up to heaven, perhaps in part as if to show that his consecrated state could have its full development only in a risen and higher life. Again, your Patron Saint, S. John Baptist, was a high example of the same state in its highest contemplative form, but he was drawn into solitude, as though there were no proper home for such a life in the midst of the world.

In these earlier dispensations the Virgin life seemed a strange thing, which could not as yet fall in with the course of the world, nor find on earth its proper sphere of development and divine service. It waited for the time when the new grace supernaturally shed on human nature should be fully realised. It had its true starting-point in the manifestation of GOD in the flesh. It had

indeed been previously revealed in Mary the Mother of God, as her pure soul, proved and endowed through the fulness of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, was fitted for her high Vocation, for in her was set forth, as far as to the mere creature was possible, the beauty of a restored humanity, to be a type of the grace of a pure Virginity, which was thenceforward to become an abiding gift of God, to be fulfilled according to their measure in all who might be called, in after ages, under the more perfect dispensation of the Spirit. But the source of power lay in Him Who, through the co-operation of the Virgin Mother, by the union of His Manhood with His Godhead, raised Humanity to its highest possible purity, our Lord assuming Humanity of a pure Virgin as the chosen instrument of the mysterious operation of the Holy Ghost.

Consider the exceeding care with which this treasured grace was guarded and preserved by sign and miracle—the Annunciation by the Angel revealing to Mary, and through Mary to the world, her exalted dignity—the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost sanctifying the sealed fountain of her Body for the accomplishment of the conception of her Divine Son, thus making a "new thing" on the earth, of nature, yet above nature; and again, the restraining grace in S. Joseph, that he might be the virgin spouse of the Virgin Mother, and thus fitted to become at once her guardian and the Foster-father of the Holy Child.

We trace, then, this precious gift of Virgin Chastity to the Home of Nazareth, to the chosen life of the Holy Family, in which the families of heaven and earth are to be reconciled, God and man become One. Thus, in union with the central life and most perfect example of

Humanity, restored in God, and in the development of its highest graces, of the purest spiritual life, Virginity was consecrated to God. And, as you contemplate that Home, watching the intercourse between the Parents and the Holy Child, and the pure tenour of their hourly life, you learn the graces which adorn and beautify such a devoted state.

There are two circumstances connected with the life of the Holy Family, which I would point out as specially bearing on the subjects we have been considering.

(1.) Observe, first, that the Virgin life in this its perfect state, was lived in familiar intercourse with the world. It grew up in intimate relations with the common order of society. It was not withdrawn into seclusion as something alien. Nor did it take the form of asceticism, or make for itself a retreat in the wilderness. It was lived in a Home outwardly like other homes. There was no exclusiveness, as though the Virgin State had no links with other forms of life; there was no saying to others, "Stand apart, for I am better than thou;" no Pharisaic contempt for other conditions of human society. In secret aspirations and communion with God, in its own secret consciousness, in movements of the Spirit within, in undistracted contemplation and desires, in heavenly love, it held its hidden course as in "a Garden enclosed and a Fountain sealed." While the Virgin life maintained its silent fellowship with the invisible, having its companionship with holy Angels and Saints within the veil, still towards the outer world and its claims, and all natural ties, it had its mission of love in all simplicity and kindliest fellowship.

Such a manifestation in the holy Home of Nazareth marks a purpose of God. It was thus revealed that

the Virgin life, perfectly exhibited in our LORD, was not to bear its fruit and influence the world only in His active Ministry and His Passion, but was to be lived in the midst of other lives, sanctifying them through a constant familiar intercourse. His Virgin Mother and S. Joseph were not set to minister to His Infancy as in a mission distinct from ordinary life; they fulfilled their daily course in the common occupations of their earthly state. Our LORD's after life during His ministry, associating Himself with social and domestic scenes, sanctifying by His Presence and first Miracle that He wrought, even the marriage-feast of Cana, was the witness and the seal of this same purpose in a wider sphere of society.

It was not therefore primarily in the form of the recluse that the Virgin State revealed itself, but in harmony with all human relations. The pure undivided love, though a hidden power, mingled with other holy influences. It took its place in the world as an ordinary influence according to the Will of GOD, and still He calls whomsoever He wills to share this special gift in union with His Virgin SON.

(2.) The second point which it is also needful to consider, is, that such a gift, setting the soul free from earthly ties, and undivided in its affections, is meant not for oneself, but for others; that the life thus separated from outward entanglements, may become all the more a perfect sacrifice of unsparing devotion for others' good. We see it in the going forth of the consecrated Virgin life from the Home of Nazareth. We see it in the Ministry of our LORD, devoted to the perpetual benediction of a lost world, a ceaseless sacrifice for its redemption. We see it in the Virgin Mother whose

one care was to minister to her own and our Redeemer. We see it in the watchful guardianship of S. Joseph, whose high example lives on, the truest pattern of unselfish devotion. We see it in the infinitely varied Vocations of those who, generation after generation, along the whole course of the history of the Catholic Church, have sought, in the power of a like grace, to follow the footsteps of CHRIST, that in the likeness of their LORD they might in Him and with Him "go about, doing good." Free to go forth, as the Spirit led the way, with the one aim and an ever-increasing scope of Divine ministrations, those who were thus called have become centres of mightiest influence, instruments in the Hand of GOD for the most generous and grandest works of mercy and piety, perpetuating in the work of the Church the unsparing self-devotion in which such sacrificing love first arose in the Person of CHRIST to glorify His FATHER.

These two conditions thus characterising the Virgin life in its first manifestations, simplicity and self-sacrifice, seem to be shadowed forth in the beautiful imagery in which the prophetic Psalmist speaks of the consecration of the Bride of CHRIST.[1] The elect soul, in the Psalmist's description, is sometimes viewed as the daughter of the King, sometimes as His Bride, whom "the virgins that be her fellows" delight to honour. This twofold character belongs to her because the King is at once the author of her life, and its Perfecter in union with Himself, at once the Parent and the Husband of the chosen one. In the Psalm alluded to, while represented under these two aspects, she is described as "all-glorious within," and as having her "clothing of

[1] Psalm xlv.

wrought gold." There is in her, that is to say, the twofold charm of hidden sanctity and the outer graces of purest love.

The inner sanctity is first set forth as specially glorious, because the beauty is secret, reserved for the eyes of Him who has glorified her for Himself, and, because unseen, it is the groundwork and spiritual source of all external graces. But it is of the latter, the outward beauty, "the clothing," of which the Psalm continues to speak, as that which more specially concerns the outer world. Gold, the purest and most precious metal, in Scriptural imagery represents the rich grace of Divine Charity. The outward effects and influences of this pre-eminent grace are then further described. "All thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia; out of the ivory palaces whereby they have made thee glad," the outward life expressing itself ceaselessly through the power of its intercourse with the world, ever encircling and gladdening it,—"out of the ivory palaces," the treasure-house of Divine Grace whence are drawn all its virtues. And again, "her lips full of grace," her utterances expressive of the pure inner mind, as of one brought close to God and living in continual communion with Him, "because God hath blessed thee for ever." The entire picture sets forth the life of the Bride as not only lovely and sanctified in itself, but as a presence and a power ever shedding itself forth in blessings beyond and around itself, full of gracious influence and attractive beauty.

Consider, dear Sisters, whether there is any true consistency between your lives and your Profession when viewed after this standard; whether you are

careful to preserve your inward and your outward state in true conformity with the meaning and the purpose of a Virgin life, thus consecrated; whether the secret fountain of the soul's life and the outward character of your work, are what GOD, to Whom you are dedicated, looks for? Try under this aspect your conversation, your feelings towards others, the spirit in which you fulfil your tasks, your passing acts, your fleeting words, as well as the inward impulses and movements of the spirit, from which spring all those outward expressions of your daily course. Let there be in all the outgoings of your life the invisible stamp of the Vocation which has sealed your Virgin life, to be a pure offering to your LORD, His blessed gift, as He "maketh glad the City of GOD," and with which your hopes and expectations of future bliss in His Presence in glory are for ever bound up.

May GOD through the power of His HOLY SPIRIT quicken in you more and more the desire to seek a perfect conformity to His pure Will, in the resemblance of your life to those who have gone before, glorifying GOD in this state, and specially to her, whom the Church honours as most blessed among women, or rather, following her in increasing union with Him, Who is your LORD and GOD, the One perfect Example, that, ever growing in earnestness of character, and truth of purpose, and singleness of aim, and earnestness of self-sacrifice, you may not be ashamed to look on Him when He manifests Himself in His glory, and you see Him face to face in the bliss of an accepted love, to rejoice with Him for evermore.

X.

THE VIRGIN STATE.—II.

The last time I addressed you, dear Sisters, I observed that the Virgin State first entered the world as an abiding mystery of grace in the Home at Nazareth, its source and highest example being exhibited in the Holy Family, our Blessed Lord its great example; and that from thence as from a centre it was to be communicated to whomsoever God might call; that it afterwards extended itself in the midst of the world, a consecrated heavenly state, a work of preternatural grace, with its own special mission, manifesting the power of a life dedicated wholly to the service of God.

S. Paul speaks of the Virgin State as specially typical of that purity which in whatever condition, whether married or unmarried, the Holy Ghost so jealously guards, the true characteristic of all His elect. For it is as the Virgin Bride of Christ that the Apostle views the Church of the Redeemed, when he says, "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."[1]

We may therefore view the Virgin life as a Divine Gift which God wills to cherish in those who are able to receive it, as symbolic of the perfected oneness of a complete dedication which in His holy love He has

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 2.

designed to work, the end of the new creation, uniting together Himself and His elect in His Blessed SON.

Let us now consider how the desire and purpose of the Virgin State arise and grow within the soul, and through the prevalence of what thoughts the heart is stirred to such self-devotion.

(1.) There is a longing for an unfettered service of GOD, free, as far as possible, from earthly distractions and entanglements, the "burnt offering" of an entirely surrendered life. The soul, conscious of being drawn, and believing it to be GOD calling it to Himself, seeks to break away from all that would interfere with the desired object, from conflicting claims, from obligations which however innocent and needful in themselves within their own sphere, involve perplexity of choice, and care for what no longer satisfies. A growing sense of aims above the ordinary current occupations of life, of impulses longing to rest in the vision and occupation of heavenly and spiritual things, in the undisturbed ministry of GOD's immediate service, takes possession of the soul. As these desires grow the Virgin State alone appears unshackled, its course alone free, its undividedness as to all subordinate interests secure. S. Paul's words, when comparing the married and the unmarried state, express what is experienced—"The unmarried woman careth for the things of the LORD, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband." And again, "That she may attend upon the LORD without distraction."[1]

(2.) The other thought which combines with this

[1] 1 Cor. vii. 34, 35.

desire, is the sense of the Beauty seen in the Person of our LORD in itself alone satisfying, as it is given and returned in conscious union of spiritual aspirations. As this vision grows the resolve deepens. The love of JESUS, His Holy Life, the light of heaven shed around all His Actions in the flesh, the accents of His Lips, His toil in going to and fro doing good, His sufferings for love's sake—captivate the heart more and more; and to be like Him, to be as He was in the world, to be free to follow Him whithersoever He goeth before, to feel that no other can come into competition with Him, to plan, to desire, to serve, with the one undivided purpose of being His, all in all,—fills the soul with a fulness of secret joy, transcending all earthly aims.

Such thoughts and desires coalescing form the substance of the devotion of a life. The vision of JESUS is the lamp which the Virgin bears in her heart; the light which diffuses itself within the soul kindling all holy desires. This brightness radiates around, gladdening all objects; and as this vision attracts the soul, leading it on to its resolve of self-devotion, so the contemplation of its beauty is the trimming of the lamp, that it may continue to shine and shine the more perfectly, "the Life of JESUS made manifest in our mortal body."

Trace now the progress of the life thus inwardly formed, and see what constitutes its power and its joy. The true virgin life dedicated wholly to GOD consists in the mutual transference of gifts and acts of love between the soul and its Virgin LORD, each giving what the other desires. As in married life between the husband and the wife, so in the dedicated life between the

soul and its God there is the interchange of true loving sympathies. What Jesus has to give to such as are wholly dedicated to Him and to His service, can be known fully only to themselves. It is of His gracious gifts to His own elect, that the Psalm speaks in the imagery to which I alluded in the last address. The words tell of what belongs primarily to Christ Himself. It is to Him the description properly applies: "All thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia."[1] The vision is of a perfected Humanity adorned with preternatural graces, wrought out, chastened, and matured, through suffering,—the "myrrh" betokening the mortification through which alone in our present fallen estate grace can be perfected in our nature; the "aloes" their cleansing power representing the purity which clothed His Person and His inmost thought; the "cassia" with its sweet scent expressing the treasures of love which animate His Sacred Heart. Such were the endowments of the Godhead enriching the Humanity which He assumed in His great compassion towards us. They were drawn forth "out of the ivory palaces," the mansions of the Supreme King, to consecrate and beautify first the Christ Himself, and in Him, as derived from Him, the members of His mystical Body, "whereby they have made thee glad."

These graces of His glorified Humanity our Lord transfers as a dowry to His chosen ones, to souls wholly devoted to Him, desiring Him alone. He communicates to each the predestined measure of these rich adornments and perfumes. He clothes the devoted soul in the vesture which adorns Himself, and sheds over and within it His gracious Gifts, limited only by the capacity of the

[1] Psalm xlv. 8.

receivers, and even beyond their capacity does He impart of His fulness, willing to wait till the heart enlarges, and the desires rise to higher aspirations, till of each elect soul it may be said, "the King shall have pleasure in thy beauty."

These communications of love on the part of your LORD are intended to excite and draw out a similar generosity on the part of the soul that He has drawn to Himself. Your LORD looks for offerings as free, as true, from each one whom His Spirit has consecrated to Himself. And souls can give as truly as they receive. They cannot indeed give aught external to themselves, they have no goods, no treasure of their own, for all they have is already His. But what He has given, it is theirs freely to give, or freely to withhold, even their very selves, the obedience of the will, the affections of the heart, the energy of loving desire, of action, of suffering. Whatever is thus dependent on one's own choice is a "freewill offering," which one can give. All the sentient and intelligent life, with its purposes and aspirations, can be given to whom one wills, even as JESUS gave Himself with His infinite and manifold treasures of grace.

By degrees the soul learns that to give itself means to share its LORD's manner of Life; to share His labours, His self-sacrifice, His burden of sorrow, His disappointments, His sufferings, as on the other hand it means to share His hopes, His joys, His triumphs, His rewards. As life opens, and opportunities present themselves, as the Providence of GOD unveils itself in successive changes of trial or difficulty, of hardness or contradiction, He searches the soul, He tests the love, the willingness to submit, the truth of the sympathy,

the steadfastness of the devotion. For to give yourself to Him as your Lord and Guide, means that as He has done towards you, so with something of the same generosity you would likewise respond to Him; that at least He should be able to say of you as of the woman who cast her two mites into the treasury of God; "She hath cast in all the living that she had."[1] This is the meaning of the soul's compact with her Lord. As He has been true to you, so should you also be true to Him. As He would so draw you into the same glory that beautifies Himself, so it is your part to cherish the grace He pours forth on you; to keep the same end in view, to share His destiny in the same spirit, to preserve an ever ready will that fails not under the strain and pressure, which at times may search you through and through. It is for you jealously to guard the promises of His covenanted love, as you so often plead His faithfulness, His steadfast truth.

There are two special characteristics of the life we are considering; (1) its hiddenness, and (2) its outward expressiveness.

(1.) First, let us consider its hiddenness. The Virgin Life is instinctively a hidden thing, hidden as in its service and its communion with God, so in its hopes and joys, its trials and its triumphs. Many do not care at all to speak even to those most closely allied to them of what has passed within them. And it is generally best to be silent as to the more secret operations of the Spirit of our Lord. We may by so doing often lose something of the freshness, the unself-consciousness, and thus of the entire purity of His inward work within the soul, even as the fruit loses something of its delicate

[1] S. Luke xxi. 4.

bloom, even from the slightest touch. Let one speak of the hidden secret, and it is as though something were gone from the soul's life, as though it were no longer one's own, not GOD's work only, or that something of oneself had mingled with His work, as though by the utterance it had become nature instead of grace. The instinctive shrinking into oneself as if to guard a treasure entrusted to one, lest another spoil or profane it, is given together with the gift itself, as an intimation that the gift is meant to be, like flowers in the wilderness, a silent offering to Him Who created it for Himself.

It may be indeed at times expedient, or even necessary, to speak of such passages of one's life; it may be for guidance, or relief, or for other's sake, or as a witness, an encouragement to others, or as the simple utterance of sensible joy and the spirit of praise; and in such cases it is well to risk the consequences of exposure, and in the power of the pure intention to trust to Him Who freely bestowed the gift, to guard it for His own sake, or make it, if it be a risk to oneself, as a means of glorifying Himself. But these are exceptions to the general rule. As our LORD so often hid Himself, passing out of the sight and reach of those who wished to exalt Him in the eyes of the world, so the Virgin Life loves retirement, lives in secret communing with the unseen, grows stronger by self-restraint, and even in the whirl and press of outward circumstances, still is alone with GOD.

S. Bernard speaks of three veils which guard the Virgin Life, thus symbolising the truth on which I am dwelling; (1) the veil upon the hand; (2) the veil upon the lips; (3) the veil upon the heart.

The "veil upon the hand" is the hiding even from oneself what one does, "the left hand not knowing what the right hand doeth;" not only avoiding the praise of men, or the notice of others, but concealing from oneself the value, or power, or goodness of one's own work; the, as far as possible, becoming freed from the clinging impression of self-consciousness, which so greatly mars and deteriorates the pure work of grace.

The "veil upon the lips" is the repression of the least word or sign, that would put self forward, or attract attention to oneself, or suffer to escape to the ears, or before the eyes of others, what would exalt oneself; the habitual guarding in all simplicity, the impulses of the pride of life, and preserving the modesty which, sitting at the interior springs of thought, diffuses, as out of a sealed fountain, over the whole being the beauty of "a life hid with CHRIST in GOD."

The "veil upon the heart" is a covering yet more intimate and closer. It is the inward recollectedness, the musing of heart, the pure selfless habit of thought, which cherishes above all other delight the treasured intercourse with "unseen" things, "in maiden meditation fancy free," a power which when matured, brings every feeling into harmony with the one great aim of life, and thus gives consistency, and unity of purpose and of expression, as of one conscious of a high, unchangeable destiny which such grace gives, all interior movements owning the spell of the overmastering vision which reveals itself more and more clearly to the soul.

(2.) Notwithstanding this characteristic hiddenness, or rather even because of this hiddenness, all the more truly such a life will ever manifest itself, for it is "the shining light which shineth more and more

unto the perfect day." In proportion as there is less of self, there is more of GOD, and "the light of the glory of GOD" shines unconsciously through the humanity in which He dwells. This tendency of the hidden life to reveal itself is shown chiefly in two ways; (1) as regards our companions; (2) as regards GOD.

Let us consider, first, the effect as regards our companions. One who lives for the pure object of serving GOD, not yielding inconsistently to lower impulses, learns more and more to love all in Him, and to serve in Him all whom He loves and cares for as oneself, and to recognize in all what each may claim or need, even as GOD responds to all His own who seek Him. The circle of those whom such love embraces, expands as the Divine life in the soul expands. The love of the heart dedicated to its LORD, becoming one with the love in which it lives, loves more and more as He loves, and like His love, extends itself as occasions offer, and pervades all intercourse with others. It is not that the heart is regardless of distinctions, or is the same to all, whatever the connection may be. It instinctively distinguishes between the special ties of nature or of grace; between those who are of the same "household of faith," and those who are only within the wider circle of Christian fellowship; or, again, between those whom like tastes and sympathies attract, and those towards whom such a personal drawing is not felt. But love, if true, acquires a width and breadth, a height and depth, in proportion as the heart enlarges to embrace the love of GOD in the place of the love of self, loving Him in, and yet above, all. If your hearts' love, dear Sisters, be of this generous spiritual character, it will reveal itself in all your intercourse one with another. There

will be no hard speeches, no hasty judgments, no unkind actions, nothing that could offend or jar upon another. Even when it may be necessary to speak words of reproof, or exercise strictness of discipline, or utter some humiliating truth, there yet will be no lessening of love. Our LORD shrank not from such necessity. He reproved; He warned; He spoke with all plainness. Yet the fervent desire of love, and the longing to bless, breathed always as the undercurrent of His pure Soul, and won the offender while condemning the offence. Nor will you, if you live in union with JESUS, and are truly copying His mind, fail to develope this feature of His life, this sure mark of His Revelation of Himself.

(2.) Again, in regard to GOD. As your life is given up to Him, so there must needs be a continual going forth towards Him in free-will offerings, in holy intentions, in ever-renewed efforts, in earnest desires. We have seen that one chief attraction to the Virgin Life is the freedom which it secures in serving GOD without distraction, and thus ministering more effectually to the enlargement of His kingdom. The devotion of those whom JESUS calls to be so closely united to Him, is intended to be a compensation to Him for what He fails to find in others, for what grieves Him perpetually in the heedless and the unfaithful. In the midst of the world's ingratitude and infidelity He finds rest and solace to His Sacred Heart in the pure and entire dedication of those who, for love of Him, have given up what they might have freely retained, having despised all things in comparison with His love, having chosen the Eternal and the Unseen in preference to the transient and the visible, making their rest and the satisfaction of their souls in Himself and His Service.

Ask yourselves, then, dear Sisters, whether this your aim is more and more steadfastly being preserved: whether the "seal upon your heart and upon your arm" has preserved its consecrated power; whether the lamp be kept trimmed, the oil ever replenished. So may you be able to meet God's all-searching Eye in that Day when He will make up His Jewels, wherewith to crown His only Begotten, His Beloved, in the triumph of His accepted Sacrifice in the final manifestation of the fruits of His Passion. Amen.

XI.

THE VIRGIN STATE.—III.

We have considered, dear Sisters, the first sources of the Virgin Life, how it arose out of a special manifestation of God, as an expression of His grace and power in the Holy Family at Nazareth. We have seen also how the devotedness of the Virgin State penetrates into the interior life of the soul, giving to it a freedom of character of its own, and a special gift of undivided, undistracted service of God.

Let us now consider how the Virgin Life realises the idea of sacrifice, and is to be viewed, when chosen for our Lord's sake, as a ceaseless oblation, a true burnt offering to God. For you are not bound to the Virgin State by any law of nature, nor is it necessary in order to attain perfection. It is chosen indeed as a means of more entire devotion to your Lord, but only as a means. It is the free-will offering of the soul swayed by the conviction of a special calling of God, to receive a higher grace and blessing through your voluntary self-consecration. What, therefore, is involved in the idea of sacrifice is necessarily true of the Virgin State.

Under this view of such a state, let it firstly be observed that the act of dedication does not cease with the dedication. The offering of the Virgin Life is not an

act finished and complete in itself. The spirit of self-oblation continues. It is an offering perpetually renewed, ever being presented before GOD, as a gift laid upon the Altar. All after acts are more or less affected by the one primary choice. As it is enjoined upon all the faithful to "present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to GOD, which is your reasonable service," such continuous devotion being a condition of any true service to Almighty GOD, so in the Virgin State in a special manner the body is ever being "presented" in the constant expression of its original purpose. This ever-present consciousness, that nothing of one's own is any longer in one's own power, "but is GOD's," has a living efficacious influence. The virgin looks to Him as having, because of her special dedication, an all-engrossing claim upon the will, the affections, the whole active energies. True that in a vow of virgin chastity the whole future is surrendered, even as the life of the tree enfolds also its flower and its fruit, and so far the first consecration is complete, yet as life is made up of a successive series of separate acts, in each of which the will is free, so the self-dedication is a continuous act, ever repeating itself in each changing phase of the soul's experience. Acts form into habits when frequently repeated, and are therefore less and less consciously felt, but yet the will that dictates them is ever free, and its freedom at every stage imparts to such acts their virtue and their acceptableness.

Further, be it observed, that offerings made to GOD are subject to be scrutinised in their inmost parts, even to the minutest particular. It was in the Levitical Law a charge specially given to the priest to see that all victims were without spot or blemish, and the

priestly seal was set on them to mark the truth of their purity. It was in reference to this law of sacrifice that S. Paul speaks of the Word of God, as "quick and powerful, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."[1] The Virgin Life, to be acceptable to God, to be the possession of Jesus Christ, must be subjected to a similar keen searching, both of soul and body, of the secret longings, the hidden motives, the varied impulses, the most cherished desires, so that the whole being may be sealed to the Lord, and thus set apart for the service of His sanctuary.

It is of the very essence of the Virgin State that the heart's love should be concentrated on Him to Whom it has been offered, not drawn away or exhausted by being spent on anything inconsistent with such high devotion; that it should have a quick sympathy with His Spirit, a ready response to His calls, ever free to give its best energies and powers to please Him. As already shown, S. Paul speaks of this as the distinguishing feature of the Virgin State, that it is without the "distractions" which attend the married state, and this a freedom not merely from multiplicity of cares and social duties, necessarily attendant on the married state, but also because the ties which bind the wife to the husband, notwithstanding their many blessings and opportunities of pure, unselfish love, may yet often cause painful anxiety arising from a conflict between contending claims, if not an actual rivalry, or it may be even direct opposition, and this however clear and high the general aim of life may be. Under such pos-

[1] Heb. iv. 12.

sible questionings much of the power and interest of life may be drawn aside and wasted, which might otherwise have been wholly spent on God and His service.

The essential characteristic of the Virgin State is its personal freedom, so that the whole strength and fulness of loving thankfulness may go forth to God unshackled, undivided. A great part of its blessedness consists in the entireness and concentrated force with which the powers of the soul act for the one end of caring for the things of God. S. Augustine has shown how the whole of life depends on the action of love. He says, in well-known words: "Love aright, and do what thou wilt." His words imply that if the spring and force of the life be true to Divine love, all exterior acts will of necessity flow fully and freely forth, love determining and animating them. Again he says: "The man is as his love is," meaning that the character and habits of every one may be discerned by the objects on which the heart's love is fixed. Both sayings express the same momentous truth. And as it applies generally to the soul's life, so does it specially apply to the Virgin State dedicated to Christ, because such a state is essentially the expression of devoted love consecrated to its highest object.

It is necessary here to consider the different forms in which love acts, to enable us to judge whether the sacrifice of a life thus devoted to God is pure, and consistent with the outward profession.

There are three different forms under which love instinctively acts, and by which therefore the truth of the Virgin State is to be judged—the love of the spirit, the love of the affections, and the love of the senses.

The love of the spirit is the delighted enjoyment of Heavenly above earthly beauty, and which, though in its fulness of bliss to be matured only in heaven, yet finds a present sweetness and nourishment in the conscious union with its unseen LORD, and with all His interests which a living faith enables it to apprehend. This love influences the moral faculties, directing them to their highest ends, and involves continual sacrifice in subordinating all claims which may interfere with higher calls, steadfastly pursuing its course, at whatever cost to oneself, in the power of the conscientious sense of a sacred duty.

The love of the affections is the drawing of the heart to those in whom it finds special delight through secret sympathies, which bind one to another in varying degrees of mutual attachment. It is in the exercise of the affections that in the Religious Life there is the greatest need of watchfulness, lest, through excess of desire for any other, or jealous sensitiveness, there should be loss of purity of intention, any diminution in the power of self-sacrifice, any interference with the higher objects of love.

The love of the senses is more like to the influence of pure instinct, and is far less deep than the love of the affections. It may arise from the mere association of tastes or desires, or the external attractiveness of manner. It may be wholly independent of the affections, and has no necessary connection with the higher spirit. It depends upon nature's lower impulses, but nevertheless has its own pure delight, and is a true ingredient in the pleasures that spring from social intercourse. In the Religious Life this lower ground of attachment also needs specially to be held in subjec-

tion, and care taken that its indulgence be allowed, or be restrained, only as the higher choice may dictate.

With regard generally to your intercourse with one another there are certain main defects, to which I would now direct your attention.

There may be an exaggerated or prejudiced feeling in favour of a loved person, so as to bias the judgment, and cause a partiality injurious both to the one who loves and the one loved, as well as unjust to others. Or unfair comparisons, and hasty condemnations, a partisan feeling, may be the result. As the unavoidable consequence of such partialities, grows up a state of mind inconsistent with the lovingkindness which should embrace in heart all members of the Community, and give to each her due. From the same cause also arise too large expectations, and the consequent liability to disappointment, with the unhappy effects of soreness or jealousy, from woundedness of feeling, or suspicions, from mere variableness or unexplained changes of manner, all the more poignant in proportion to the amount of the natural sensitiveness.

Hence again come restlessness and anxious questionings, proving how one's happiness and peace have been allowed to depend on another's conduct, or what is supposed in another. Ordinary kindness or courtesies will be interpreted to mean special predilections, and motives may be attributed which had no ground but in one's own imagination. On the other hand there may be defect in the charity which ought to be felt towards other members of a Community bound together in one body, as when unreasonable aversions and dislikes are felt, or allowance given to over-strong expressions of disapproval, or hard judgments, or un-

kind sayings, causing often, when thoughtlessly repeated, as sooner or later they probably will be, the severest pain. Or again, there may be neglect and disregard, or lack of mutual respect, even of simple courtesy. Such signs indicate that the soul has allowed itself to depend on mere impulse, or natural feeling, instead of seeking to bring all inward thoughts "into obedience to the Mind of CHRIST." The fault in either case, whether of excess or defect, is the same. GOD has not all that was offered to Him. His Love does not reign in the heart. His Will does not preponderate over the tendencies and desires of the natural life. There is no sufficient union with the Heart of JESUS. The purity of the sacrifice is marred by the lingerings of the natural selfishness, which either claims too much for itself, or denies to others what they may rightfully claim. There is need of inward searching, of the cleansing of the fire which, coming down from heaven, consumes all that cannot meet the jealous Eye of GOD. It is only as the spirit is replenished, and instinct with the Love of JESUS, that it can be free from the bondage of these irregular impulses, and, rising above itself, learn to go forth as His Spirit guides in widened sympathies, in enlarged considerateness, in more generous tenderness, in greater evenness of temper, in calmer judgment, in disinterested thought for all whom the LORD embraces in His Heart of love.

Such love is the true light of the virgin's lamp, and the richness of the oil that feeds it. For what is her lamp but the earthly reflection of the Light that gladdens the heavens? What is the oil within the lamp, but the Spirit of the LORD? And what is the Spirit of the LORD but Love? And what is His Love but the

flowing forth of the Heart of God? The Virgin's lamp has a twofold radiance, one ever turned towards God and fed by reflection from Himself, the other turned towards her Sisters, as the emanation of the Divine gift, the one necessarily subordinate to and dependent on the other, but yet essentially one with it. And what is the trimming of the virgin's lamp, but the purification of her soul's inmost life, causing it to be, ever more and more, serene, and gentle, thoughtful and kind, considerate and true, fervent and yet subdued, aspiring heavenward, yet embracing all true claims of earth? And when does the heavenly Bridegroom most surely find the love for which He yearns, but when there is an ever ready freedom to go forth as He calls, whether in some effort of devoted labour, or some seemingly casual expression of kindness, in each of which He is alike honoured? When the Lord finds such response to His calls, the Virgin's life is true. She may then rest in peace in the blessed expectation of the time of His approach. She feels that she is watching that, whether sleeping or waking, she may be ready, her lamp burning, whether she work or rest; whether in active labour or in silent prayer; whether sad or joyous.

Yet there should be no impatient eagerness for your Lord's approach and your own deliverance. The sole anxiety should be to shine on, manifesting His Grace, and winning His approval, attracting others to Him, while yet unconscious of the power which through you He works, glorifying Himself in His Elect.

When at last the Lord comes, and the pure Light dawns which has kindled the Virgin's lamp from afar, as it shone more and more unto the perfect Day, and the

flames of mutual affection meet, His Heart with her heart, each at rest in the other, with the full reward of all that has been endured or done or designed, what then will be the completeness of her Beatitude? When the time of the departure is come, I will not say the death, but the falling asleep, as for a moment, to awake in the consciousness of the endless gratification of all that love desired, the sinking into the Everlasting Arms, as the soul feels around it the infinite, the ineffable, the Holiest, what will be the raptures of that hour, the joy of the vision of her LORD in His Glory, the sealed acceptance of the accomplished life, the entering into the Paradise of GOD, the garden of delight, where the soul will receive its final purification, waiting for the Day of triumph, the manifestation of the victory of His Grace in His Beloved?

The time of waiting may seem weary, because of the longings of love; the purification painful, because of the as yet unsatisfied yearnings of increasing desire; yet faith rests in the felt "substance of things hoped for," the evidential revelation of "the things not yet seen." Even now at times may be felt what it will be when the struggle is over, the fear of ever sinning again past, the very possibility of temptation gone. But how far beyond all that we can imagine, when this sensation is eternally felt in its fulness, when the treasure long laid up in Heaven is secure, the assured promise, the final, unchanging and unchangeable union sealed for evermore, the bliss complete, when both soul and body are made for evermore ineffably one with the LORD, to be at last, "without fault before the Throne of GOD, to serve Him day and night in His Temple!"

XII.

SIN IN RELATION TO THE RELIGIOUS.

Dear Sisters, we are just entering into Lent, the Church's season of Repentance. For yourselves it has moreover its special exercises,—increased opportunities of retirement; more securities against interruption; more of silence; and thus a concentration of influences furthering spiritual discipline, both as to outward rule and inward devotion.

I need not delay to prove to you how the necessity for repentance continues until the very closing hours of life. Indeed as the Spiritual life advances, penitence becomes even more deep and true. For every fault, even the smallest, is then more keenly felt; humility has gained a wider influence; the consciousness of what sin is has increased; sorrow for it becomes more poignant, and thus the spirit of contrition penetrates more entirely throughout our nature.

During this season we are all called to dwell upon the thought of sin. I would lead you more especially to consider in what relation the subject stands towards a Religious. And first I would confine my remarks to the condition of those just entering the Religious Life, the earlier stage of the Novitiate.

Let it be borne in mind that an act of self-dedication, however complete and earnest in itself, does not imply

perfection in any part of the inner life. The act of self-dedication contemplates and embraces the accomplishment of its purpose as its only true end; it implies truth of resolution, and a settled bent of the will, but not any definite attainment. However fervent the dedication may have been, there remain the same faults of character as existed before. Nor can it be expected but that certain infirmities and the possibility of the incursion of various faults, continues even to the end of this earthly probation. To one only has an entire freedom from the incursion of any actual sin been given. It was the special privilege of the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, to be without the stain of any actual transgression, an exemption from the effects of the original corruption affecting all the children of Adam, granted to her, that she might be fitted to become the chosen vessel of the Incarnation of God. We all alike, though called to be perfect, yet have to mourn our imperfections.

It is well to consider the reasons why this liability to sin so universally besets our being, even after our best efforts, and with real advances made in the acquisition of grace. There are three chief reasons which cause our frequent liability to faultiness and sin.

(1.) The indwelling Presence of God was the special endowment of the unfallen man. This constituted his original righteousness; it was an investiture clothing him within and without, and filling him with preternatural holiness. It held sway over all his faculties and powers, and preserved them in harmonious action as well as raised them above their own proper nature. The consequence was that the several attributes of humanity fulfilled their various offices in due subordi-

nation, the lower to the higher, and the higher faculties to the Divine Influence, thus inspiring and directing the whole man. This Gift ceased with the Fall, as the Shechinah fled from the Holy of Holies, when the veil of the Temple was "rent in twain," because of the awful guilt of crucifying the SON of GOD. Even so original righteousness, that is to say, the investiture of the Divine Presence, separated Itself from the nature that had rebelled. Though in the life of the regenerate there is a restored Gift of the Indwelling Presence of GOD, yet it is after a different manner, and with inferior results. It has not the same fulness, neither is it accompanied with like high gifts of illumination and power; nor does its influence penetrate as at the beginning. The Divine Presence now co-operates with man to perfect him, but only in dependence upon, and correspondence with, his own efforts. It depends on man's own faithfulness, the HOLY SPIRIT, as He "witnesseth with our spirit," leading him, drawing him on, advancing him, but only with many hindrances, as the herb of the field planted in uncongenial soil struggles upwards under all liabilities to decay, and risks of inclement seasons.

(2.) Another cause is to be found in the concupiscence, which constitutes the essence of original sin. By this is meant that activity of self-love and desire of self-gratification, which fixed itself in our nature on the withdrawal of the Divine Presence, which is at work in every faculty both of the mind and the body, affecting all alike, though manifesting itself differently according to the different tendencies, dispositions, and temperaments of each. It may become fainter, it may be subdued, its outward effects and demonstrations may

be checked, it may less and less practically influence, but it is always present as a power, and a root of evil; and may at any time spring up when grace has been allowed to grow weak, and vigilance has slept; and this, it may be, in very subtle forms, seen perhaps only too late to the soul's uttermost grief and confusion. Such fallings, however, may be made, through the grace of God, a precious means of deepening the consciousness, and the sense of the awfulness, of sin, and cause the clinging malignity of self-love to be more clearly understood and more intensely hated.

(3.) The third cause is, that as we do not now see God face to face, we cannot be influenced by Him as the Blessed, who are with Him in Heaven. We do not experience the full effulgence of the Light of Glory and the Beauty of Holiness. It is before us, but invisibly, seen by faith, not by sight, and therefore without its full effect. We see now, as in a glass, "darkly," we know only "in part."[1] Perpetual shadows interrupt the brightness of the Living God; all the manifold forms of earthly things hide Him from us; "the corruptible body presseth down the soul;" the difficulties, the contradictions, the false allurements and deceits of the world around us, cause ceaseless disturbance and distraction, and present everywhere an opposing force.

These different causes act more or less upon all the children of men. No act of self-devotion, no circumstances of a dedication, however true and solemn, no vows, or strength of purpose, can free the soul from their consequences. They are universally at work, and lie in watch for opportunities, except as they are subdued by grace.

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

But I would here specially lead you to dwell on certain cautions necessary to be borne in mind during a Novitiate. On entering the Religious Life the Novice comes with the faults to which she has become liable; she cannot in this respect but be the same as she was before she entered. The passing through the doors of a Religious House does not form the crisis of an internal change of character. The same tendencies and dispositions are inherent in her, though there has been a momentous change in her circumstances. The same liabilities exist as before, though the old ties and bonds that kept her within the lines of her former habits of life are unbound. A Religious, in commencing her Novitiate, has separated herself from many outward things which may have hindered her spiritual aspirations, and rendered her devotional life more difficult to pursue. She is now free, and her soul's desires concentrated as they never were before. But she is in herself unchanged, with the same nature, the same temperament, the same liabilities to sin. The possibility of sin is not one that depends upon outward circumstances, but upon the interior condition of the soul. It depends not so much on what acts on the soul from without, but on the forces acting within. "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evil things come from within, and defile the man."[1]

There is even a difficulty arising from the very fact that the outward circumstances of the life are changed. The outward form and sign of the fault may in conse-

[1] S. Mark vii. 21—23.

quence be changed also, and so may deceive. The very novelty of the outward aspect under which a fault shows itself, hinders its being seen. A Religious may at times be surprised and taken aback by a reproof, wondering what the fault has been, even the act itself may have been done in obedience, and yet it may be the very same fault as of old for which she had reproved herself before, only now manifested under a new aspect. She needs to enter on a new study of herself, to take a new view of her spiritual standard, to see herself through a different medium, simply because of the fresh shapes, and colours, and diverse circumstances, under which the old faults are now revealing themselves. The fault has taken a Religious aspect. It can be viewed only together with spiritual objects, only in contact with high and heavenly things; it may have even a semblance of goodness. And this may indeed be entirely true as to the act itself, while yet the inward spirit may be evil.

There is therefore to the Novice special cause for watchfulness and holy fear, lest there should be self-deception; lest from the novelty and unwontedness of the changed form and aspect of her life she lose sight of her special characteristic faults, vainly trusting that they are gone, because no longer seen as of old.

At the same time there are advantages attending the first entrance into the Religious Life, and the Novice needs exhortation as to the duty of making the most of them, while still guarding against the constant danger of self-deception.

One special advantage even in the first dedication is that the Religious has altogether taken her place on the side of God, and by this act has witnessed against

all sin and all allowed fault, and everything inconsistent with her high Vocation. There may be much of evil still working in her, faults and infirmities still clinging to her, yet she has taken up a position expressive of an absolute purpose to subjugate these tendencies, and to strive against them under every form. The outward aspect of a Novice is that of one who testifies to the love and power of the highest principles of spirituality, and the perfect life. This very position is a sustaining force, and a new ground of effort. The sense of the claims which she has acknowledged, of her responsibilities, of her new relation to God and to holy things, are a help to effecting what she has undertaken. For it is an instinct of our nature that an absolute assertion of a principle is in itself a strength, makes things clearer to the mind, and opens the way more definitely for the soul to rise to the accepted and avowed standard. And this strength helps to sustain a Novice. She goes forth with the consciousness of a settled purpose, with a complete harmony at least of the will and of the desires, as she determines to seek the highest aim in the service of God.

S. Augustine says that "the desire of Perfection is Perfection." His words no doubt intend to express what has been here stated, that the assertion of a high aim in a true real sense embraces the end, because of its settled tendency towards it, and because it contains in itself the power of an accomplished resolve. Such a spirit may unreservedly trust in God, trust to grace enabling it to attain that on which the heart is set, and to which it feels itself called. But still with this fixed purpose there may come other forms of self-deception. The very trust in the greatness of one's

aim may mislead. It may be thought that its very strength is in itself sustaining. That oneself is strong because one feels strong, is the temptation which has deceived many. The Novice therefore needs constant cautions, lest she fail to bear in mind her need of the long interval of discipline, of the exercise of self-denial, and the labour lying before her. For although the imagination may paint the future as already almost within reach, yet the way that must be trod is often weary, and "strength is always perfected in weakness."

The charge given by God to our first parents, in the first hour of their repentance, contains a warning which applies to one entering the Religious Life. The charge was grounded on the great principle of the need of prolonged discipline in order to attain the desired end. God would not suffer them to stay within reach of the Tree of Life, lest they should be deceived by its nearness suggesting the thought of their fitness, and so tempting them to put forth their hands to "take it," when the result would have been "to live for ever,"[1] as they were, untransformed, unsanctified, even as before they had been tempted to the impatient aim to be as gods before the time, and through means of their own choosing. Even in the first stage of their repentance the temptation might have returned to hasten the end, to be inconsiderate of the necessities of an intermediate discipline, and ignorant of the slow degrees through which actual restoration follows desire. They would have thus lived on "for ever," as they were, at the point where in their eager heedlessness they had broken off the time of trial. It was to avoid the risk of committing again the very same sin that they were driven

[1] Gen. iii. 22.

from the spot, and bidden to go forth to another temporary sphere of life, to a course of labour and discipline.

God sent the man forth to "till the ground from whence he was taken."[1] There was a lesson in this which the Novice may well lay to heart. By it was meant, of course, not merely the toil of hand, but the toil of the head, of the mind, of the heart,—the whole wear and tear of the manifold forms of travail to which humanity was to be made subject, "in hope" that thus chastened and renewed, man might be restored to his lost heritage; the labour during the appointed time, and the effect of his toil, being to him the constant means of practical improvement, to work in his soul the obedience and conformity to the Divine Will, from want of which he fell, to learn as a renovated gift the purity he had lost by the very effort required for its restoration. It speaks to the Novice of the toil necessary in the course of discipline to obtain the end of her desires.

There is moreover a very special force in speaking of "the ground" on which man was to labour, as that "from whence he was taken." The recollection of his origin was intended to impress on his mind the state of feeling with which his period of probation was to be borne. His kinship with the earth was to show him the nothingness out of which he arose, to be to him the continual witness of the necessity of humility. As the tiller of the ground bending over the soil, he was to be perpetually reminded of the lowly source out of which he was framed by the Hand of God. In all his labour the repentant man was to meditate upon the truth of his possessing a life taken out of the dust, to believe

[1] Gen. iii. 23.

that all his hope rested on his preserving that consciousness, on fulfilling a state of ceaseless dependence on the creative power and ever-present assistance of Him, Who had breathed into his earthly tabernacle "the breath of life."

A Novice may learn important lessons from this dispensation of God. While she sees so vividly before her the end of her course, and anticipates the glory for the sake of which she has offered herself to God, there is the temptation to feel that the access is made ready, and the preparation comparatively easy. Lifted up to heaven, as it were, in the hour of her dedication, filled with the vision of a perfect union with her Lord, and the assured promise involved in her acceptance, the end may seem as though it were already come. But as she must turn to the routine of labour, and the details of discipline that have to be undergone, and sees stretching out before her the course in which she must learn to surrender herself, practising habits of obedience, and the entire compliance of the will, as the one proof of her sincerity, as the only means of attaining the end of her desire, so also she needs to keep in mind the consciousness of what she is in herself; the origin of her being, and the source of all her strength; that she is nothing in herself, taken out of nothingness, and able to claim nothing, having therefore no ground for self-exaltation. It is hers to cherish this constant recollectedness, to strive to quench the thought of pride, to mortify self-love, that the period of probation may be passed in lowly acknowledgment, not merely of her constant liability to faultiness, but of her inability to think a good thought, to do or to bear what may be pleasing to God, except as grace is given, and the preter-

natural guidance and strength work and prevail within her soul.

However fervent may be the desire for her Profession, though at times of special fervour it may seem to be so surely within her reach, the Novice must ever remember that there is always more to be learnt, more yet to be done, perhaps something more searching to suffer. Above all, she must try to attain to the most difficult task of all, that of real mortification of self-love and personal sensitiveness; that as she bows herself before GOD, that He only may be exalted, and His Will only accomplished in her, so in regard to what is due to others, her spirit must learn always to be in subjection, "esteeming others better than herself," content to be little in the eyes of all, even as in her own.

Remember always how he who said, "I have a desire to depart and to be with CHRIST,"[1] said also, "I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith, I have finished my course."[2] The readiness to depart was the consequence of the travail, and the conflict sustained to the end.

Consider, then, what must necessarily lie in the onward course that is to be lived, what must be borne in the advance that has to be made, the faith to be tested, the resolution to be fulfilled, before the shining of the perfect Day, the ineffable Blessedness of the accomplished end. However eager the aspirations, keep ever in view the need of constant aid from above, through which alone the end can be attained. Bear in mind that even the greatest saint has been unable to grasp the Tree of Life, till he has proved himself worthy of it, through many labours and much tribulation,—that

[1] Phil. i. 23. [2] 2 Timothy iv. 7.

even your heavenly Lord Himself could attain His perfect end only by learning "obedience through the things that He suffered," and this in deepest self-abasement, even to the Death of the Cross, which He has sealed for ever, to be the means of our redemption, and His chosen sacrifice which He willed to accomplish before He entered into His Glory.

XIII.

SIN IN RELATION TO THE RELIGIOUS.—II.

Dear Sisters, I would now lead you to consider the special relation in which a Professed Sister stands towards sin, and her liability to fail in the full truth of her Vocation.

And, first, let me remind you that the line of thought which naturally leads to a deepening of contrition does not at all imply a low stage of spirituality. On the contrary, as I have before observed, while life becomes more fervent, advancing into higher degrees of Grace, the mind becomes at the same time more alive to the possibility of sin, more earnest, more tender in acts of repentance, in self-examination more searching. In fact one of the surest proofs of growth in the Spiritual life is the increased depth of contrition. This follows from the fact that contrition depends in great measure on the amount of Divine knowledge, and of spiritual experience. In proportion as a higher intelligence is brought to bear on the conscience, contrition deepens, extending itself into regions of thought and feeling, which had remained untouched in the earlier and less instructed stages of the Spiritual life.

One caution, however, is here needed. It does not follow that this more perfect contrition is accompanied by feelings proportionately increased. In the earlier

stages of repentance, when the first pangs of conscience are felt, and the keen sense of sorrow is a new thing, compunction has, on the very account of the novelty, a more than ordinary vividness. As experience deepens, and higher regions of spirituality are reached, the life generally becomes calmer, like the higher regions of the air, and its progress more even, having less of marked contrasts. Contrition partakes of this change, becoming at times almost imperceptible in its action. But as long as there is a growing sense of higher things, and of the need of advancement, and regret for failings and defects, there must needs be contrition, though it may be more silent, because it has entered into profounder recesses of the soul's life. It may become an unconscious influence, while yet ever at work, its sure test being an increasingly earnest desire for amendment, and a tenderer regret at failure.

With this caution I proceed to point out the special grounds for apprehension in the case of a Professed Sister, and the temptations peculiarly besetting her.

(1.) The soul is subjected to a very critical test when the immediate discipline of the Novitiate has ceased. The constant supervision and instant correction of fault are then comparatively withdrawn. The consciousness that even the slightest error will at once be dealt with, is no longer in the same way realised. During a Novitiate the constant sense of supervision presses upon the mind, and this acts as a check to any faulty tendency, and of itself tends to preserve the soul, not merely from the effects of infirmities of which it is conscious, but of those also which it discerns not, and which are liable to come out in act or omission when the pressure of immediate restraint is removed.

After Profession, although the influence of the Rule and general discipline of Community life remain, yet there is not, nor is there intended to be, this same strictness of control, it being assumed to be no longer needed. The soul's life has been tested, and confidence is reposed in the permanence of the impressions that have been made, and the habits of discipline which have been formed. It is assumed that only the more general restraint of the higher authorities, and of Community Rule, are now needed.

This advanced state has its own peculiar danger. The fact of being left more free, though liable at any moment to feel the force of discipline, without which the Religious Life would cease to be Religious, the being more thrown on one's own responsibility, more trusted as already tried and accepted,—this may incline the soul to lapse into a false security, and a negligence, of which the powers of evil may take advantage, and some possibly grievous fall be the result.

(2.) Again, the Professed Religious may be soon placed in a responsible position. Some post of authority, and rule over others, may be committed to her. This again has its danger, and special ground of temptation. Authority and influence of any kind, however subordinate, tends to bring out the whole strength of the character; nor could the responsibility be adequately fulfilled, or real work done without it. But when the powers of the soul are thus brought out into full play, any tendencies to evil are also liable to be brought into prominence, and roused to action. Infirmities and natural defects are then more keenly excited, and more vividly perceived; and this in proportion to the importance of the position in which the Professed

Sister may be placed. The very effort necessary to carry out any charge felt to be of any importance, magnifies the infirmities and defects. Characteristic faults mingle all the more seriously with the increased activity of the deeper elements of the life. It is often observed how our special infirmities lie close beside our better qualities; as, for instance, gentleness of character is liable to an over-yielding softness; or zeal to heedlessness, or impatience; or a mortified spirit to austerity; or prudence to indecision. And as our better qualities are intended to have their full play in the exercise of authority, so the attendant weaknesses are the more likely to creep in.

Often tendencies to faults and weaknesses may be dormant and unperceived during a Novitiate. Having no special opportunity for their expression, nor brought prominently into contact with others, they have not been dealt with. They may even be as the tares which at first appeared to be as the good seed, and only as they grew, manifested their origin and true character. But a position of rule and of trust, involving greater freedom and increased activity, and this at every point coming into contact with others, involves also greater risks, as well as more frequent opportunity for advantage being taken of our weakness by the enemy.

(3.) There is another cause which we need to consider, to which may be traced a further liability to sin in the later stages of Spiritual life. All of us are more or less conscious that, as life advances, although we may rise to a higher level, and upon the whole attain a securer state of grace, yet a tendency to relaxation is often generated from the very fact of our advancement. This cause of at least partial decline falling in with

the natural sluggishness of a fallen nature, may affect even those who are living under rule and habitual discipline.

You are tempted, it may be, to leave off some guard which you had set on the observance of a rule, or some special use of devotion which the energy of your earlier fervour had adopted; or there may be less strictness in self-examination, or less sustained efforts against distractions in prayer. Circumstances may arise under which certain relaxations become unavoidable, and may be perfectly safe, but the change may have arisen without any real cause. It may have been merely the effect of familiarity, or the loss of the stimulus of novelty, or a passing weariness, or distaste. There is need, at least, of careful inquiry whenever such omission or disuse has occurred. For we are constantly disposed to fall in with an easier course, and feel a fancied safety, notwithstanding any omission, in the supposition of a more advanced state. But the very highest grace needs the sustaining of rule, and often even fresh aids, and unwonted exercises, are required to sustain or requicken old uses. And there is always danger lest unforeseen temptation may find an entrance when we have deprived ourselves of what, though scarcely felt, had become secretly the safeguard and strength of some holy purpose.

It is necessary to bear in mind that the life of the Professed, even in its most advanced stage, must always depend for steadfast security against the incursions of evil on the preservation of a careful and wise self-discipline. Let me suggest for consideration, one outward, and one inward, ground of steadfast progress.

(1.) The original purpose of faithfulness and self-sacrifice ought to be continually cherished by fresh

self-consecrations. Thus, for instance, the observance of days of commemoration, or the renewal of vows, or periodical testings of the truth of one's Vocation in Retreats, have a sustaining effect. It is not meant that such exercises, however fervent, will prevent the recurrence of faults. There will ever be the liability to wrong inward movements, arising, it may be, from error of judgment, or warmth of temper, or instability, or soreness, or from distracted or disturbed feelings. Such faulty influences will more or less affect the steadfast tenor of the mind. From such influences as these none are free. It is indeed fatal to allow the thought, that we are ever free from such possible incursions even to the last hour. Such a confidence would savour of self-trust and pride, and would be the sure prelude to a fall. But supposing such faulty inclinations to arise, they may not in themselves be sins causing shame. Warmth of temper, if there be a lawful cause, is not in itself a fault; error of judgment may be but an infirmity; soreness of heart need not necessarily be attended with resentful or jealous feelings; distractions may be simply a distress. But there is in all such cases a danger, a tendency which might instantly develop into actual sin, unless guarded by the strength of purpose sustaining the texture of the soul's life, and the preventing grace which is kept alive by habitual devotion.

Let the steadfast aim be cherished; let the truth of the Profession be preserved as a living consciousness; let the intention of advancement remain firm, fed at the sources of renewing grace,—then these powers of the soul will be ever ready, like friends at need, to act at once, to arise in self-defence, supporting the soul,

checking the tendency to evil, as soon as the consciousness of disturbance is felt. They stand by, as it were, as unseen, unfelt guardians, till the moment of need is come, and then, often to the surprise of the anxious soul, supply the needed check. If the habitual purpose dominates within the soul, even though a fault be committed, it cannot prevail, for the spirit quickly returns to its steadfastness or melts into self-reproach, ready to receive reproof or hint of wrong, listening obediently to the voice of conscience.

(2.) The inward power I would mention is the personal love of our Blessed Lord. If love to Him be real and true, a fire ever burning, then as soon as the soul turns aside towards some wrong thought or action, quickly the sense of the wound inflicted on His Sacred Heart, the untruth to the vow that binds the soul to Him, is stirred with power to recover its lost estate. Love keeps alive the inner springs of all that is pure and holy and true. All changes of the soul's life seem to depend on the rise or fall of love. As love is rightly directed, life advances; as love loses its simplicity, life is perverted; as love declines, life is torpid; as love ceases to act, life sinks and becomes a prey to every temptation. What would the Religious be without a conscious fervent love to her Lord? Think how in married life, if the love of husband or wife be the ruling principle, it quickly corrects every tendency to wrong; how it restores confidence and rekindles brightness, if there have been variance; how it moves the heart of each to each, if either have been hardened by irritation or complaint. On the contrary, without love how quickly does variance pass into alienation, and the sense of injury deepen. The very closeness of the rela-

tionship aggravates the soreness, and the resentful feeling. So is it in the Religious Life. On the question whether the love of the soul to her LORD be a ruling power, a dominant principle, or no, depends whether there be a readiness to correct faults when discerned, or calm a distracted mind; whether the law of virtue and the power of grace, which have been checked in their exercise, be enabled quickly to resume their even course.

In such acts and states of mind, through the blessing of Almighty GOD, lie the preservatives of the life of the Professed. As they are cared for or neglected, in like proportion her life either corresponds to the claims of her Vocation, or falls from it; her faulty tendencies are being overcome, or will still cause her shame.

One further consideration needs to be laid to heart in guarding the Professed Religious against any failing in her course.

I have already observed that a Novice on her first entrance into the Religious Life at once places herself in direct antagonism to all evil, to all that could displease her LORD. She at once takes her stand on the side of GOD in the struggle against sin. But a Profession implies something more. One who has been accepted, and is now indissolubly bound to the exercise of the Counsels of perfection, takes a stand in antagonism not merely to sin, but to imperfection. She is not merely on GOD's side against all that He hates and has condemned, but she is on GOD's side as to all that He has shown to be the higher way, when a lower path might without fault have been chosen. The Professed Religious takes her stand as to this more perfect way, and sets her soul to the full resolve of resistance

to all that hinders the continual progress of her Spiritual life. Not indeed that these Counsels of perfection to which she is vowed, in themselves imply a life of perfection in those who are Professed, but that they are intended to be a means towards its attainment, and in entering upon them perfection is implied as their proper end and completeness. They proclaim the purpose that the Professed Religious has at heart, the desire that is ever before her eyes. She can thenceforth allow no spot or wrinkle on the soul. When once discerned she is bound to do whatever will help to remove it. She is consecrated to the special aim of preserving that attitude of soul, which exercises itself not merely in putting away whatever bears the aspect of a fault, but whatever also hinders the progress towards the perfect state, or mars its fulness.

I would not be misunderstood in speaking of such liabilities to sin affecting even those who are the more advanced in the Spiritual life, as though I were casting discouragement or doubt on the faithful and trustful heart; my object is merely to show the constant need of carefulness, and this the more earnestly because of the height of aim, and the sacredness of the Profession.

The object of my remarks has been to show how much need there is to keep yourselves humble and pliable; to be persuaded that there is yet much to be done; that it is essential to cherish a gentle, tender readiness to acknowledge every passing fault; that there is need to deepen the grace of repentance, remembering how a "godly sorrow" even at the possibility of sin intermingles with all true forms of saintliness. Yet with all this bear ever in mind as a ground of ceaseless joy, that in the sight of God to be aiming

at perfection is in His prophetic sight seeing us only in CHRIST, as though it were already attained. He sees the end in the beginning. He credits us beyond our possible hope with what He wills Himself to work in us in His own good time. To turn to GOD with a full trust, with an unquenched desire; to turn quickly away from what is faulty towards what is more perfect; to acknowledge the fault at once so as to rise again to what is true, however imperfect the act,—this is to be already treading the more perfect way. It is the truest progress and advance, even if we fall, to bear anything by which we may repair the fault, and rise to what is better, not fearing to know the worst of ourselves, not shrinking from others knowing what we really are.

This is indeed to be stretching forth to the heights to which you aspire. This is accepted as real faithfulness by Him Who has called you, while yet you prostrate yourselves in lowly acknowledgment of unworthiness. And the promise is sure that all who thus trust in Him, and thus seek Him, shall at last know by a blessed experience the truth and power of His perfect sanctification.

XIV.

SIN IN RELATION TO THE RELIGIOUS.—III.

Dear Sisters, I have already observed that the deepening of contrition is a real proof of the advancement of Spiritual life, and that the higher the soul rises in grace the more steadfast and tender is its attitude of penitence before God, until at last contrition becomes an habitual consciousness.

This arises, as I then showed, from the fact that contrition increases with the increase of Divine knowledge, and Divine knowledge increases with advancing life, imparting a clearer view both of the inner Mind of God, and of the fallen state of our nature, while the sense of the greatness of one's responsibility increases also as the necessary accompaniment of the growth of spiritual intelligence. It has moreover to be borne in mind that contrition does not act merely in regard to particular sins which have been committed, but also in regard to our liability to sin, and the danger arising from the general weakness and faultiness of our nature. On this account therefore the action of the contrite spirit increases as we advance onward; because in early stages of Spiritual life, however earnest we may have been, there is comparatively but a slight experience as well as little practised insight into the causes of our faults, and their various developments. Or these may

have grown up with us, and therefore require the more time to discern them; or they are so associated with our good qualities that we fail to disentangle them; or outward circumstances have given a false colour to them; or again, our very earnestness and enthusiasm have shed a haze over our whole being, hiding from us various imperfections, if not actual transgressions. Years pass before we are able to see ourselves clearly, and the contrite spirit depends greatly on a true vision of our interior being.

Moreover, so wide and vast is the area of the Divine Life, that it is impossible to take in all its bearings, or all the ways in which we may fall short, except by a gradual approach, and an enlightenment slowly acquired through increasing self-discipline.

These thoughts are but suggestions intended to give rise to other thoughts in yourselves as to the probability of faultiness still remaining to be corrected, and much perhaps in the way of necessary progress still to be sought. Such inducements to deepening repentance will, I trust, neither weary nor depress you, but rather be felt as a spring to more earnest increase, opening fresh views of possible attainment in grace, as well as stimulating more earnest inquiries as to the facts of your spiritual state in the sight of your Lord. For God blesses every such endeavour by His good Spirit Who inspires it, His reproving and convincing work ever leading on to perfecting our sanctification.

It is often cast as a reproach upon the Religious that they have fled from the exactions and trials of the world, and while escaping from its manifold claims, have lost the opportunity and the blessedness of the self-sacrifice, the daily, hourly submission of spirit,

taught through the claims of society or of home duties. It is urged that these are at once our appointed burden, and the fruitful source of holy discipline, and that those who separate themselves from such claims fail to follow the order of spiritual advancement, as well as the true uses of life, as Divine Providence had formed it for their good.

On such questions you must have all alike judged yourselves. But as to the motives actuating you there may be always need of careful investigation. No doubt there are temptations acting upon some, leading them to forsake the world and its duties, and to seek to become more perfect through self-chosen ways; to leave God as He reveals Himself in the ordinary ways of the domestic or social life, to seek Him in ways more unusual, perhaps more romantic. But all true Religious would resent such a charge, though they may often have to bear the suspicion, because those not so called cannot feel the power of the motives which incline the soul to abandon the world. They cannot guess what it is that prompts the desire to leave states of life which though lawful, and holy, and necessary to be kept up, are yet incompatible with the true peace and usefulness of those whose Vocation points to another destiny, who follow a vision that has possessed their souls.

At the same time the Religious, however purely actuated, necessarily requires time to learn what the full meaning of her act of self-dedication is, what the full extent of God's claim upon her. The first feelings influencing her are the sense of the oppression of outward things—the thought that God cannot be fully served in such a mixed and disordered state, as if all around formed a continual hindrance to the accom-

plishment of the highest desires. There is felt not necessarily impatience, but repugnance at such a condition of things, as if in the world's life there were no room for or possibility of entire devotion, of satisfying the longing for prayer, of developing an undivided love. The desire grows for a state in which religion may become the one ruling principle of all action, and GOD be acknowledged and honoured as the one end of existence. There may be exaggeration and excitement in the estimates formed, or in the view taken of the conditions and possibilities of life. But where is there enthusiasm, or fervour, or zeal, without some measure of excess and unbalanced judgment? Love is proverbially blind except to its treasured desire. But the very excess may prove all the greater reality. The very excitement marks some deep inward movement. Zeal is characteristically impetuous because of its native strength.

Still those who have thus been moved and impelled onward, have yet to learn all that is involved in a state more in harmony with the conceptions of the soul, more satisfying to its promptings, more consistent with that absolute sway of Divine obligations, in which the pure ideal of life and the more complete unity of purpose, which the imaginative mind has pictured to itself, can be practically carried out.

To learn the full extent of what such a Vocation means, requires much experience and an enlarged knowledge, such as only gradually grows as day follows day, and year succeeds to year. As each idea becomes clearer, the extent of the vision still ever expands, and unexpected vistas of thought and inspiration open more and more if the life is to become indeed true to all that GOD reveals, as the end and purpose of His predestination.

These considerations, if calmly dwelt upon, will lead to a deepened view of the extent to which contrition may act, of the full demand which repentance, in order to be perfected, makes on the Professed Religious. It will tend to this completeness of repentance if you bear in mind the different heads under which the Religious Life is to be viewed. They are three—(1) The courtesies of life; (2) the moral duties; (3) the counsels.

In regard to the first two heads, a Sister treads on common ground with those whose life is passed in the world. She has thus, as it were, to compete for the comparative excellence of the world's, or a Religious Community's, training. It were to be hoped that in both cases a Religious would infuse into such exercises her own spirit, and thus raise them through the power of her consecration to a more perfect state. But they ought ever to be subjects for earnest and cautious self-scrutiny.

(1.) The outer world prides itself on courtesies. The value at which they are commonly held amounts almost to a religion. Though ordinarily actuated by no high sense of principle, they constitute the charm of what is called good society. For the most part indeed acts of courtesy are but matters of unreasoning habit or conventional use, dependent on outward circumstance. But often they involve much of self-sacrifice, and kindly mutual respect. Holy Scripture speaks of courtesy as a virtue, and it is enjoined as part of Christian duty—"Be pitiful, be courteous."[1] But not merely is it expressly enjoined; it is represented as a latent principle to be embodied in all intercourse with others,—as, for instance, in the injunction, "Let each esteem others

[1] 1 S. Pet. iii. 8.

better than themselves;"[1] and again, in the case of meeting rudeness or injury, "not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing;"[2] and again, in overcoming evil temper, "A soft answer turneth away wrath;"[3] and again, in dealing with antagonists, "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves."[4] Such Christian courtesy in its varied forms of expression is, when uniformly and evenly preserved, the very perfection of self-forgetfulness, the highest practical exhibition of self-restraint and inward recollection. Not seldom is it seen to be the result of high principles in domestic life, forming the special beauty of a true Christian home. It may there rise still higher into loveliest forms of spiritual self-devotion, and, becoming part of the fulness of Divine love, gladden the Communion of the Saints in our LORD'S heavenly kingdom.

Courtesy then should have its special seat in a Religious Community, and this not as matter of external rule, still less of conventional formality, but as a grace, instinct with real self-sacrifice for one another's good, with loving-kindness caught from the Love of JESUS, and with constant thoughtfulness as to what is due to others in manner or in act, in word or in inward feeling, for His sake Who lived and died alike for all, as Love's truest Victim.

Let, then, such grace of courtesy be shown in constant exercise among yourselves; in readiness to do kind actions, yet making nothing of them; in quickness of sympathy towards any who may be lonely or depressed; in habitual response to the least sign of desire of recon-

[1] Phil. ii. 3.
[2] 1 S. Pet. iii. 9.
[3] Proverbs xv. 1.
[4] 2 Tim. ii. 25.

ciliation when there has been estrangement, or rather an anticipative winningness of manner predisposing towards it; in facilitating the restoration of love between others with whom there may have been differences; in lovingly welcoming home those who have been absent, and at all times hindering the sense of strangeness or of loneliness; in quickly observing opportunities of giving assistance in times of need, or encouragement in despondency, or the gentle removal of any painful reserve, of shyness, or chill, by words spoken in due season; in giving necessary though trying reproof with the sweetness that disarms opposition. Such acts require effort till they become habitual. They may in some degree be the results of constitutional temperament, or of a happy ease and facility of manner, but they are the true fruits of the Spirit, to be learnt in the school of a holy self-discipline. They are always, like the attribute of mercy, twice blessed, blessed to those that give as well as to those that receive.

There is the greater need of care in these respects among Religious, because of the very greatness of their aims, and the earnestness of their zeal. For these may incline the soul to think less of what seems comparatively such mere matter of ordinary detail, and at best but the accessories of duty. The ideas that possess your souls in Meditation, and the necessary care of a responsible charge, are indeed so absorbing, so superior to all other claims, that they may well require, if they do not exhaust, all the energies of the soul, and so involve the risk of allowing the subordinate acts of love and duty, as it were, to take their chance, as if they might be fairly condoned, and be overlooked in the pressure of higher things. But such self-excusing de-

lusions can have no real place in the thoughts of those who seek to be perfect, and really live to God. As to the very least claims of Christian duty, when contrasted with the highest acts of self-devotion, our Blessed Lord's words have a special application: "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

(2.) With regard to moral duties, it is unnecessary to prove to you that the patient exercise of such claims in their several varieties, forms the very texture of the character, is the basis on which any high spirituality can be reared, and constitutes the means of bringing both the higher and lower elements of our nature into harmony with the Righteousness of God. I would rather dwell on the practical way in which moral dutifulness is to be exercised, and the discipline through which, in the Providence of God, it is intended to be chastened and matured.

It is by accepting the means through which God teaches us, and recognizing His Hand in the events by which He acts on the soul, that true virtue is attained. There is therefore a liability to sin in not allowing God to have the Sovereign Rule in directing the outward means of spiritual and moral discipline. He moulds and fashions our interior life by the pressure of a constant external agency co-operating with the work of His Spirit dwelling within us. How should we ever learn long-suffering, patience, uniform kindness, active gentleness, habitual humility, or indeed any of the many virtues and graces of a true life, except by knowing how to benefit by the rebuke, the reproof, even the hardness, or neglect, or indifference of others? The various checks, disappointments, jars, we meet with in the wear and tear of outward things, or through the

defects and faultiness of others, whether intentional or not, the wrong in others coming into collision and so provoking our own,—these are indeed the ordered or permitted instruments through which God works. It may even be His will to allow imperfections to remain in ourselves or in others, in order that they may become the means of discipline, and so of forcing us to acquire mutual forbearance, and a more generous submission, thus practically teaching us, as by a sad necessity, the various virtues which grow and strengthen only through the constant play of mutual intercourse. There may be a blindness in failing to discern this, to perceive how God, behind the scene of outer things, works on us through His creatures, and thus a loss of progress, or rather a turning what might have been a gain into a loss, with the superadded guilt of an impatient resistance of His influence, thus causing sin where there might have been an advancement in virtue. Too often there is a lukewarm lingering in a low estate, or even a decline to what is worse, because no heed had been given, no care taken, to correspond with this remedial process, by which God would teach His elect to endure, to bear and forbear. For we were destined to rise to a true life of love and conformity with the Mind of our Lord, Who "learned obedience by the things that He suffered."

This outward law of discipline is intended to act on us not merely when all goes smooth and to our taste, and when leisure renders it easy to gather up our thoughts, but in moments of haste and pressure, when our safety depends wholly under God on habit, and the practised recollectedness of a disciplined spirit. It is as we are trying habitually to use all outward changes

and chances in the way of spiritual improvement, and greater humility, that we grow, and become established in the Life of God. The faults of others are no excuse for our own. Nothing of outward hindrance or provocation can take away our own guilt, or diminish it in the sight of God, because these passing trials are the very instruments by which we are to profit. It is the very process He has ordained for this end, and to discern and accept it is a material part of that system of conformity with the Divine Will, into which you are pledged to enter, that God may be All in all, seen, felt, acknowledged, and adored, in all His ways.

(3.) Of the Divine counsels which form the subject matter of your special dedication, I need not speak particularly now, as they have been already set before you in detail. But this only I would add. The counsels are not to be regarded as something distinct and separate of themselves, having no relation to moral duty or social courtesies.

On the contrary, they are truly cherished only when they enter into the general tenor of life, and influence all outward acts and inward impulses. Inconsistencies in regard to the claims of courtesy, or of sympathy for others, or in practical dutifulness, are to the Religious not merely faults in their own order, but also breaches of the counsels, and so, beyond the moral wrong, marring the very end and aim of your dedication. They are in your case aggravated, because of the dishonour cast upon your Sisterly character, beside the specific loss of Christian principle. The practice of the counsels ought to raise every act and impulse into a higher sphere, and give an increased stimulus to the efforts after the commonest virtues and simplest graces. The lesson to

learn in all things is the sovereignty of God, overruling everything, directing everything, making all to work together for the perfecting of His Saints, for the moulding and fashioning of every member of the mystical Body of His Son into the Divine Image in which He will be glorified. In all things, great or small, your thought must be, What will God have me to do? What will He have me to bear? What is His purpose, what His pleasure, in each passing change? You cannot look at anything outside the range of God's ordering, or feel that aught is denied you of means suited to accomplish your advancement. You can never rightly say, "This matters not." "This is too small a concern to affect those who are living for a great ideal." To think thus would be to separate God from His own appointments, to say "He has no part in this." It would be to confine God to the general superintendence of the things of this world, and exclude Him from all its particular details, while yet it is only the combinations of these details which make up the general order. That all created life and its results may be brought into harmony with the purposes of God, everything must be viewed as a manifestation of His Will, either intended or permitted; and whatever there be in the vast circle of events that affects one's own individual self, must be viewed as having some claim direct from God, and therefore to be used as a means of personal discipline, of exercising oneself for the great end of being perfected in Him and for His glory.

Take, then, this large and generous view of the Divine demands. Look closely into the very letter, the least portion of the meaning of the Divine Will acting upon you. However trying or difficult the circum-

stance may be, believe that God has a purpose in it, some demand upon your life, for which you are directly responsible. Then all movements in the course of this world, as well as the actions, the words, the thoughts, the tempers, of others, will become the occasion and the incitement to some exercise of grace, some inward act of prayer, some means, however passing, of gathering up your soul's full intent to the fulfilment of the one perfect end. The Religious Life thus disciplined would become a constant practical truth, a manifestation, hour after hour, of a perpetual rule of grace. Action would become rest; all trial would end in peace, would in itself be peace; and the lines of duty and of love would be ever extending upwards into a complete unity through Christ in God.

It is as you view the different obligations of your state under these aspects, dear Sisters, that your self-examinations take their full and true range; that you are enabled to see where and how far you fail; that the various liabilities to sin in thought, word, and deed, become manifest. And thus contrition will have its perfect work, and the soul be led onward into a true conformity with the Mind and Will of God. So may His Spirit guide and teach you, and may the glory of your Lord be advanced by your constant endeavour to follow Him, as He has called you, and as, in His mysterious inward revelations of Himself, He has purposed to bless you in union with Himself, for ever and ever. Amen.

XV.

THE ANGELIC COMMUNION.[1]

The approaching Festival, dear Sisters, which, together with the whole Catholic Church, you are about to commemorate, fixes our thoughts on those blessed creatures of God, who are gathered around His throne in Heaven, or ministering in their several offices throughout His creation according to His Will.

In considering the vocation and the life of the holy Angels, we may learn lessons helpful both to those just entering the Religious Life, and those also who have made proficiency in it by long experience.

In this world we see only such manifestations of the Mind of God as are embodied in His lower creatures—ourselves the highest among them, yet far lower than the lowest in the scale of heavenly existences. Rising higher and higher in the scale of creation the different orders range, each one a separate expression of the Mind of Almighty God, as He forms His perfect kingdom of intelligent creatures. His great design of expressing Himself, in outward visible forms, reflecting Himself "as in a glass, darkly," thus representing in some faint measure His Divine Perfections, was possible only by calling into existence manifold distinct orders,

[1] Preached immediately before the Festival of S. Michael and All Angels.

each endowed with some separate characteristics, and so expressing, as far as it was possible, by their manifold individual varieties His Fulness.

When we speak of the holy Angels, we are calling up to view innumerable hosts of creatures of many different kinds, exhibiting different features of the beauty and glory of God. Think of the wonder, the rapture, of Daniel and S. John, when they beheld one individual only of the glorious company! What would it be to look upon a host of those wonderful creatures,—what thrilling ecstasy, and awe, and love, would be stirred within us!

Most precious to us is the thought of the life of the Angels in God, and their varied ministries. Precious is the commemoration both for our Lord's sake, and our own. For our Lord's sake, because He is the Lord of the Angels, because through His obedience and humiliation in our nature He obtained for Himself, in His Humanity, the supreme sovereignty over all the orders of heavenly creatures, though once "made lower" than the lowest. He became for evermore the Object of their adoration, and they His instruments, expressing His Mind, rejoicing in His triumph, executing His purposes and His will. For our own sake this commemoration is precious, not only from the thought of all we obtain through their ministries, but also from the close companionship, and unity of aim and desire, which connect us with them. For although they are beyond all thought greater than ourselves, with an excess of purity we cannot comprehend, and highly exalted in power and intelligence separating them from us by so wide a gulf, yet Revelation assures us of a communion of the dearest and tenderest kind.

The Angels and ourselves are spoken of together in Holy Scripture as one "family." A domestic tie, as of brother and sister, links us together in fondest fellowship. One "family" we are "in Heaven and in earth."[1] The words imply that the distinction between heaven and earth is already done away in the power of the angelic fellowship.

Again, the Scriptures declare, that we are bound together in a mystical bond through a personal union in CHRIST, because "it pleased the FATHER that in Him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the Blood of His Cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."[2] The holy Angels derive from the Sacrifice of CHRIST some addition to their bliss, a closer union with GOD in which we and they alike participate.

While therefore we recognise the superior grandeur, and power, and holiness, of the Angelic Hosts, we are to cherish earnestly the sense of our oneness with them, the mysterious fellowship in GOD through CHRIST, evermore binding us together, not only because He is their LORD and ours, but because they share in some measure with us the common benefits of His Incarnation and His ministry, the kinship thus formed being of that tender, affectionate kind which we associate only with family relationships.

In some respects moreover this great Festival is, dear Sisters, specially your own.

And this, first, in regard to the main objects of your life, the aims that have drawn your souls to fix themselves on GOD. It is often questioned whether the con-

[1] Eph. iii. 15. [2] Col. i. 20. See also Eph. i. 10.

templative or the active life be the greater. And when each is viewed as full of God, instinct with the one thought of glorifying Him, when He alone is the object sought and honoured, any comparison seems to be lost in the greatness of the end to which the efforts and desires of both modes of serving Him are directed. But in contemplating the holy Angels we see both orders of life coalesce. We see in them the commingling of the contemplative and the active life. Devotion and active work are united in their lives. Each is equally prominent. They are ever dwelling in the Light and Joy of God, and, instinct with this consciousness, they are ever being sent forth to minister. They are sometimes represented covering their faces, and their feet, as they prostrate themselves before the altar of God,[1] sometimes flying, as with outstretched wings, throughout heaven and earth. They differ in outward appearance, yet are ever inwardly the same,—"They do always behold the Face of My Father Which is in Heaven."[2] says our Lord, and yet, as S. Paul testifies, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"[3]

We thus see embodied in these highest orders of creatures a life similar to your own, a mingled life of devotion and of action, of the contemplation of God and ministries of love. And yet it is scarcely true to speak of such a life as a mixture of two lives, when it is rather a mutual interpenetration of the two forming a unity. Their perfectness results from the oneness of the two powers of created life, ceaseless inward adoration, and the untiring fulfilment of the Divine purpose to bless,—the energy put forth now towards God alone,

[1] Isa. vi. 1. [2] S. Matt. xviii. 10. [3] Heb. i. 14.

now towards His creatures,—a harmony of Divine love, sometimes rapt in the stillness of purest worship, sometimes absorbed in the execution of their momentous charge. Their name, "Angels," messengers, would of itself bespeak the predominance of the active life, and to the elect people of GOD they are known chiefly under this beneficent characteristic, as the loving agents of the mercies of GOD, ceaselessly at work. But this very activity only the more shows the fervour of their love fed by the constant vision, the "always beholding the Face," of GOD.

They thus represent in those high spheres of existence the combination which you seek to form within yourselves, in which you seek to grow as the completeness of your vocation, recollectedness of mind in the midst of the absorbing interest of active service. And these two forms of devotion, if your lives be true, will not merely intermingle, but the one will assist the other. Active service becomes unselfish and pure from the constant realisation of the Mind that is in CHRIST JESUS, and contemplation becomes deeper and more real in devout minds from the practical discipline and conscious sense of spiritual need which grows with earnest action. They are different states of mind, and develope different powers, but, as life forms into a unity from the power of a single aim and an undivided love, they coalesce to form a perfect whole.

(2.) In another respect the commemoration of the holy Angels is specially your own. In what the Church has ever held concerning their nature we see exhibited special characteristics of woman's true vocation. Peculiarly feminine qualities predominate in the view presented to us, and, consistently with this idea, Catholic

art has portrayed them with features that distinctively belong to woman's form. We are assured that the time will come when the differences of the sexes that now prevail, being a temporary economy, will be done away; when literally there will be "no longer male nor female, but all one in CHRIST JESUS;"[1] when such distinctions will pass into some higher state of a perfected humanity, in the Resurrection, where "they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the Angels of GOD in Heaven."[2] At present neither sex exhibits the completeness of a perfected humanity. Different characteristics distinguish the one from the other, each as it were being the complement of the other, but these distinctive characteristics will at last coalesce into the fulness of the Divine expression of what human nature was intended in its completeness to be, and as it was embodied in the all-perfect Form of our Blessed LORD. There are two such characteristics which are prominently brought forward in what we are taught to believe of Angelic natures, characteristics which indeed, in their degree, necessarily mark all true manhood, yet are intended to be exhibited in more than ordinary completeness in woman, and more especially made to be accordant with her state in relation to man. These two are unselfish love, and submissiveness of will.

(1.) There is in a true woman's breast a love which often puts man to shame by its unwearied generosity, its forbearance, its pure obliviousness of self. In their several degrees, a sister, a wife, above all, a mother, exhibit, as a mere natural grace, a purity and extent of love, in comparison with which man ordinarily feels his imperfection. Special exceptions there of course may

[1] Gal. iii. 28. [2] S. Matt. xxii. 20.

be, and grace will supply in this life, to man equally as to woman, something of the fulness of love which will bless and gladden the life to come. But still as a characteristic attribute of our present nature and condition, there is a marked predominance of this feature of the Divine Mind in what is now constituted to be, in some respects at least, the "weaker vessel."

This special grace is wondrously exhibited in the holy Angels. While in them there cannot be anything on which love in us so much depends, which forms so much of its power—domestic relationships, compassion bred of the sense of common sufferings, bodily sensibilities, sexual attractions, there yet exist, independently of such subordinate impulses and partial influences, to an extent far beyond our experience, fervours of self-devotion, self-sacrifice, and absorbed interest in others' good, the pure self-less desire to bless. It is quite inconceivable to us how, considering the utter unworthiness, the wretchedness, the miserably alienated state, of those whom they are sent forth to tend, to guide, and to cherish, they are yet ever expending the fulness of a ceaseless love; and this, year after year, day after day, never leaving their charge till their work is done, and the purpose of their mission accomplished. How except from the fact that they are ever drinking in from the Heart of God streams of the perennial flow of His own infinite compassion, from Him Who is Love, could such a mind, such a ministry be fulfilled? How does their love perpetually contrast with the experiences of our straitened hearts, so partial, so restrained by passing selfish impulses, so mixed up with mere personal feelings, so ungenerous, so dependent on mere subordinate influences, so wanting in the power of

sacrifice, so craving for returns of self-gratification, so often chilled, and all but dead!

(2.) Another characteristic which the Creator willed to exemplify specially in a true woman's nature, is the action of the will in subordination to a higher will. When GOD designed woman to be in subjection to man, —"thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee,"[1]—He intended, we may believe, to exhibit in her person the subjection of the Church of His election, and in it of every individual soul, to her divine LORD, and eventually of all humanity in its perfectness of conformity of will to the Will of GOD. It was intended thus to exhibit the created will, while yet endowed with freedom, acting in perfect subordination to a higher Will, and desiring, as its rest and hope of glory, such subjection, first in woman as the distinctive type, hereafter in all our race as the antitype, in the Communion of the Saints in Heaven.

This condition of the will forms part of the perfect holiness of the Angelic nature, as well as the groundwork of their activity. For what is that complete self-surrender, that unwearying energy, that lightning speed, that instant readiness to accomplish any task, however lowly, and to persevere in it to the end, however ungenial or abhorrent to their nature, but this fact of the movements of their wills being in absolute and all-pervading subordination to the immediate dictates of the Divine Will, one with It, and wholly lost in It? The holy Angels are as the Breath of the Living and Life-giving Mind of GOD. They are as a ceaseless emanation of the designs and love of GOD; the expression of the instant movements of the thought of GOD;

[1] Gen. iii. 16.

and thus, instinct with power, because inflamed by God, they go forth. "He maketh His Angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire." They are so through the energies of the will in their glorious natures, indwelt and vivified by the mightier Will of God, as flame kindling flame, the created power endued with all but Uncreated energy, not, indeed, as no longer its own, but as willingly yielding itself to be acted upon, and so receiving a power above its own, in which to give forth its own energies freely and fully, seeing nothing, knowing nothing, but only what God would have to be, His own perfect ideal, His absolute sovereignty among the creatures of His Love.

In these two respects then, dear Sisters, we may trace the likeness between the characteristic qualities of the holy Angels, and what was designed to mark a perfect womanhood.

One other quality which should also distinguish woman's nature with a pre-eminent grace, is touchingly represented in the nature of the Angels. I allude to the condescending gentleness with which their mighty energies are accommodated to our feebleness. Consider what we endeavour to realise in meditating on an Angel's ministry—its compassionateness, its forbearance, its tenderness, its sweetness, and these forms of grace exhibited in persons of grandest intelligence, of awful power, of purest sensibilities. Contrast their wonderful stooping down to our necessities, their watchful tending care, their reverent meekness, with our haughty thoughts, our personal prejudices, our self-assertion, our particularity, our many selfish aims and interests, our predilections, our dislikes and distastes, mingling in with our best works and highest designs.

Or if we are freed from these worse features of our natural corruption, how difficult for us all to divest ourselves of the clinging self-consciousness which rises to deteriorate all our efforts to serve God, when often even the higher the aim the more is this evil stirred to assert itself, turning what was fondly desired to be for His glory alone into a means of greater self-exalting. It will help to shame us, it will deepen our sense of sin, to compare the pure, self-forgetting generosity of love ever ministering around us, of fellow-creatures so far nobler than ourselves, with our marred and straitened services.

As we contemplate the holy Angels we also attain to a truer knowledge of God. We may trace the expression of the features of His Wonderful Being in their various orders and ranks of intellectual and moral greatness. They are on the steps of that ladder which, uniting heaven and earth in the Prophet's vision, formed mystically the stages on which they "ascended and descended on the Son of Man." As you contemplate them, dear Sisters, may they suggest to you holy thoughts, breathe over you the virtue and savour of their own blessed life, quicken in you the fire of a like love, shed within you light from their own radiant glory; that you may be impressed more and more with the grace, and knowledge, and love, which so beautifully shine forth in them; that standing before the Face of God you may more fitly adore Him, as, instinct with renewed life, you more earnestly do Him service. May He, their Lord and yours, own you as worthy to be gathered in at last together with His Angels closely around His Throne; yet, while one with them, clothed with a yet more mysterious glory, and drawn into a yet more in-

timate union, because God has willed, that they only who share with Christ the Humiliation of the Days of His Flesh, and His glorious Body, should attain the full measure of His Reward in His perfected glorification. Amen.

XVI.

THE PROPHET'S CALL.[1]

"And he said unto him, Go back again; for what have I done to thee?"—1 Kings xix. 20.

These words occur in the deeply touching scene, where Elijah passed by Elisha, and revealed to him the will of God that he was to be his companion, and afterwards to succeed him as a Prophet. He announced this sudden and eventful call to Elisha, as he walked beside his yoke of oxen, not by word of mouth, but by a significant sign, by casting "his mantle upon him." He thus spoke to him of the Mind of God and of his own destiny. It was a sign well known in those early days, one of special symbolic import, which Elisha at once understood to imply a call to separate himself, and give himself to a new Master and a new service.

The covering him with his mantle was a sign of union, of a covenant of life to be lived with another, as in the natural order it betokened the union of the wife with her husband. Thus, in the case of Ruth in the beautiful picture of the rustic life of Israel, when claiming the rights of kinship, she asks of Boaz, "Spread

[1] Having been preached as a Sermon, it has been preserved in its original form, though, in this respect, differing from the Addresses with which it is here associated.

thy skirt over thine handmaiden."[1] This same significant sign was transferred to a higher sphere of thought in Ezekiel, where the Prophet represents the redeeming grace of GOD in drawing souls to Himself, and binding them to Himself for ever. "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread My skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the LORD GOD, and thou becamest Mine."[2]

The custom, therefore, had acquired a high spiritual significance, that of a person being united with another in a special bond of devoted life. To Elisha it announced, that he was thenceforth to be separated from his home, from his former companions, from all the associations of his former state, to be linked with Elijah in a common destiny, and a new spiritual fellowship. Afterwards when Elisha, obedient to this first call, had accomplished what may be regarded as his Novitiate, and his Master had ascended in the "chariot of fire," his earthly mission owned in heaven as the prelude to his future glory, the "mantle," falling upon him from above, was again the token that the accepted Prophet was to go forth in more than his Master's power, even with a "double portion" of his spirit.

This old primeval sign of the covering mantle has been preserved by the Catholic Church, and has become a significant symbol of the Religious Life, the Habit placed upon the Religious being a witness of the separation from their former state, of their being taken up into a higher, of their being bound by new spiritual ties,—a sign that GOD has made a covenant with them,

[1] Ruth iii. 9. [2] Ezek. xvi. 8.

and united them with Himself to be specially His own, to live a new and consecrated life, to serve with a new and devoted service.

Elisha at once responded to the call; he "ran after Elijah." It was the action of one who had already been quickened with a preternatural impulse, who had been waiting for the call to carry out the purpose which his soul had had grace to conceive. It was while thus excited by the first sensations which the call awakened in Elisha's soul, that Elijah's strange rebuke came to him, "Go back; what have I done to thee?"—a strange welcome to meet the manifestly eager neophyte, such as must have at once both startled and perplexed him, and caused a revulsion of feeling that would force his whole soul back upon itself.

There were apparently two thoughts in Elijah's mind which expressed themselves in these unexpected words:

(1.) "What have *I* done to thee?" What desire, what influence of mine has affected thee? What is there in this outward sign to account for thy following me? What is there in my course or act to cause this sudden attachment to me? He would throw Elisha back upon a deeper thought than a personal following, or mere personal influence.

When God spoke to Elijah on Mount Horeb, He told him that amongst the thousands of Israël there were some who had not "bowed the knee to Baal," who had "not kissed him," some who were instinct with the love of the truth, and the pure spirit of devotion, according to the faith of their fathers; and that among such faithful ones He had secretly called those whom He had chosen to go forth as witnesses of His sovereign

grace, instruments of His power and His love amongst the unfaithful. He named Elisha as the one who would respond to the Prophet's call, and be endued with power from on high to follow Elijah. The Prophet then would bid his follower to look to this hidden witness of the Divine Election, to what had passed within his own soul between GOD and himself, to the real power which had moved him, the Unseen Presence which, as It had directed the steps and actions of Elijah, so now was revealing His purpose to the object of His choice. "It is not to me, it is to Another that thou must look; not on me, but on Another that thou must lean; not to me, but to Another that thou must give an account of thy fitness to leave thy present calling, and devote thyself to share my destiny of toil, it may be, of suffering."

(2.) Further, Elijah saw in the quick eager movement of Elisha something that needed strengthening; a purpose not yet fully aware of what the cost would be, not probed to its depths as to the possible risks of future temptation, or of nature's soft pleadings. Elisha had asked a question of Elijah similar to that which in later ages had moved our LORD to reply with a like warning. "Let me," he said, "I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee."[1] With a similar intent, one of our LORD's disciples had said unto Him, "LORD, suffer me first to go and bury my father,"[2] and the answer came, "Follow Me; and let the dead bury their dead." How striking is the circumstance that He Who had implanted the desire, should Himself check it, throwing the man back upon himself to consider what the desire involved, and how great the risks that beset its accomplishment!

[1] 1 Kings xix. 20. [2] S. Matt. viii. 21, 22.

There can be no question how we are to understand the warning against the return home, in the case of Elisha, even though it were only to bid his parents farewell. We cannot suppose that Elijah, any more than our LORD, would undervalue nature's fondest ties, the claims of natural relationships, least of all, of duty or reverent love towards parents. There must have been in the special case, some conditions of family life in direct antagonism to the Will of GOD, which would possibly present a hindrance insurmountable to the mind of the child, an obstruction which he could not overcome, and thus both the purposes of GOD be thwarted, and the high destiny intended for His servant, whom He had chosen, fail of its accomplishment. It was a case in which the demands of Him Who framed the laws of nature, overruled its ordinary claims, because they were no longer in harmony with His own Mind, and even opposing His designs. The Prophet saw the danger of a forfeited vocation, and a frustrated purpose of the divine law. His words came home with a solemn warning, as though he would say, "Thou knowest the enthralments of unbelief and idolatry which will be cast about thee under the endearments of family affection. Beware of the danger which would make shipwreck both of thy own faith, and of the purpose of GOD towards His Israel."

Elisha understood, and his heart responded to the truth of the warning, as he read it in the light of the call which possessed his soul, and in the consciousness of the overruling Will which had revealed itself to him. He takes "the yoke of oxen," and on the altar formed of "the instruments of the oxen," he seals, with the sacrifice of all that he possessed, the dedication of

himself, his soul and body, to follow the divine call, already, in spirit and in will, embracing the Prophet's destiny with all a Prophet's risks, to receive "a Prophet's reward." He sees the need of an instant surrender, as though the cause of JEHOVAH and His Israel hung on the decision of the moment, and all must be abandoned for the sake of the everlasting Covenant.

Let us now suppose that GOD is speaking, not the Prophet, though in the Prophet's words, to one who would hasten to respond to His call, as Elisha did, but to whom GOD would speak some yet deeper things, and make known some deeper revelation of His Mind. "Go back," we may suppose GOD Himself to say to one who thus seeks Him, "what have I done to thee?" Different thoughts might be suggested by the question.

(1.) Have I laid on thee any necessity? Have I bound thee by an absolute will? There are commandments which are necessary to salvation, which no living soul can be free to break, and, breaking, must fall from the true life in GOD. But the Counsels lay upon the soul no such bounden law. They are not a necessity to life, but a means for the greater perfectness of life. There is a call to holiness, without which no man can see the LORD, which rules all life in CHRIST. There is a call to self-consecration, to a devotion which makes that which is our own a holy offering to the LORD for the more entire and closer union with Him. The very essence of such devotion is its freedom. It is the self-abandoned choice, the dependence on the soul's desire to rise above and beyond the necessities of holiness, which constitutes the power, the very meaning of the

call to this higher devotion. Is it this self-consecrating purpose of the unconstrained will that works in thee? Is it not merely My Own Will, but thine also, that seals this act of dedication of what, as long as thou willest, is thine to give or to withhold?

(2.) Again, Hast thou counted the cost? Is there no lurking doubt? Do nature's softer impulses yield themselves to the severer course which the law of sacrifice involves? Is there, beyond the impulse of desire and the fervour of spiritual affection, the moral courage and the firm resolve, braced by a singleness of purpose, both to make the solemn choice, and to brave the consequences which it involves? There lie ofttimes, both at the entrance and in the onward progress of a life thus entirely devoted, hindrances which only the pure self-forgetting will, and the conscious embrace of the special call of God, fed by deepest conviction, can meet and overcome. Is the hand so "put to the plough," that there is no "looking back?" Are there no secondary thoughts, no self-interested motives, no latent desires likely to rise and overmaster the passing impulse; no undercurrent in the soul's life, dormant for the while, but liable to be stirred, and give a changed aspect to all the circumstances and views of life?

(3.) Again, "What have I done to thee?" Think of what thou hast known and seen; the visions which have been upon thy soul, the convictions that have been wrought, the impressions which the realities of eternal things have left. Think of the aspirations that the Spirit of Eternal Glory have breathed in thee; of the hopes, the confidence of heavenly affections, of spiritual powers, which thou hast experienced from His indwelling grace. Think, on the other hand, of the loss, the for-

feiture of the glory and the greatness of the Reward attached to a life-long faithfulness to such a manifestation of the Will of thy LORD; such an election of grace fraught with such endless consequences, the desire of GOD to bless thee, and in blessing thee to bless others also in thy blessing. What would be the amount of the loss; what the weight of the Reward forfeited?

(4.) Again, "What have I done unto *thee?*"—thee, specially called out from others,—thee, individually sought by Me,—thee, gained by My seeking,—thee, laid hold of by My predestinating Love, which reaches forth into the infinite, the unseen, to perfect My work,—thee, taken out of the thousands "who have not bowed the knee to Baal," nor "kissed him," that thou mightest be My instrument to restore Israel. Think what such an individual call is—Who is the Caller, who is the called, the meeting-point of the Creator and the creature in this work of love,—The Almighty, All-holy, choosing, the unworthy one, the chosen object of unknown purposes of love and hidden joys. GOD seems to say that not for oneself only, but for those in whom He wills to glorify Himself through the instrumentality of His ministers, He calls, and asks, "Wilt thou be no longer thy own, but wholly Mine, for such a venture, for such a gain?"

The Prophet's call, moreover, shows how the power of the sacrifice rested on the personal self-consecration, the personal response to the personal call of the Living GOD. See how Elisha, as he surrendered himself, surrendered at the same time all that he had. "The oxen and the instruments of the oxen" are at once sacrificed, and, as in the case of S. Matthew, the entireness of his self-sacrifice must be commemorated by a great feast,

"and he gave unto the people, and they did eat; then he came, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him." All was given when his own personal life was given. For what are external possessions to one whose life is no longer his own; what are earthly goods to one who has been sealed to a Prophet's destiny? It is the interior life that GOD seeks; and, if that is truly given, all is His.

Moreover, if we look to Elisha's after history, we see what promise of blessedness and of power attends such a surrender as his. Great as was Elijah, the very chief of the Prophets of Israel, the type of the forerunner of our LORD, yet Elisha was greater still in miracles and powers of blessing,—raising the dead, with powers of vision capable of seeing and hearing beings and voices of other worlds, gifted with a mysterious ubiquity of presence; whatever he willed, seemed to come to pass. He has been considered to be a type of the HOLY SPIRIT within the Church, signifying the Gift Which came down from heaven after the Ascension of our LORD, which Elijah's mounting in the "chariot of fire" had foreshadowed; that as the Church waited for the fulness of the promise till the Master was gone—"Ye shall do greater things than these,"[1]—so "the double portion" of the Spirit of the Prophets waited till Elijah had gone. Elijah had prepared the way, but Elisha received the fuller gift. And even in moral strength he rises above Elijah. We hear not of him fleeing for his life from the face of the persecutor. We see him not fainting "under the juniper tree," longing to die. His course was one of uninterrupted service, strong in faith,

[1] S. John xiv. 12.

ceaselessly blessing others, as ceaselessly blessed himself. It was a continually conscious trust in God, knowing that He Who had called him, would surely accomplish that for which he had been sent.

And so it is in all true responses of the soul to God. With the call there comes the inward assurance that He Who has called, will surely never fail us, that He is true to His promise, and that the calls of God involve the promises of God, "the Same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Among the multitude who will stand up at the last day to witness to the Truth of God, may it then be yours, having been true in the day of His power, to lift up the voice of thanksgiving in unison with the great host, which in the day of His victory will "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth," the eternal issue of the following on earth, where faith learns to prepare for the fulness of the Beatific vision, and hope is already filled with the anticipations of its bliss. When the veil is lifted up, and the real Advent is come, and the vision of Him Who hath called you is seen, may He say to each one of you, in words which will never pass away, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

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